

# SEA WRACK

Vere Hutchinson



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## Sea Wrack



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BY  
Vere Hutchinson



F. D. GOODCHILD  
TORONTO  
1922

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To  
D. M. B. B.  
WHO BELIEVED IN IT  
WITH PATIENCE  
BEYOND WORDS  
*Sept. 1920-Sept. 1921*

2136030 '



“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts; all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me.”  
—*Psalm xlii.*





BOOK ONE

SEA WRACK



# SEA WRACK

## CHAPTER I

### I

**I**T all happened years back when I was a younger man and my beard less thin and gray. I was, in fact, respectably journeying toward the middle-aged period, when circumstance, or fate,—have it as you will,—took charge of me. It is certain I was weaker about the joints when the drama was ended. As you know I am, and always will be, a nomad of uncertain employment with an ill-bred way of doing one job one day and trying another the next. Sheer boredom made me follow up an advertisement for a drawing-master at a school in Lincoln, somewhere about the year 1835. Sheer boredom—and circumstance in the shape of a devil of a storm—put me off the track forever.

I have seen storms before, east and west, north and south, hot and cold. But that night in the Fens! I tell you it was the witch's hour with the broomstick; it was a devil's triumph! November—and you know what November is like in England! But that November was like a mad dog yelling and foaming its way abroad. There was snow and there was rain:

slashing, cutting, biting rain, and frozen, jagged snow. But the wind—there was the poison, that was the madness! No trumpet sounded on high could have been like the trumpetings of that wind! No shrieking in hell like the shriekings of that night! It came like wings, great storming, battering wings,—outspread and thundering around the earth; it came like laughter—bawling, brazen laughter as of a drunken man bellying among the roof-tops!

We were hugging the coast, and hugging it too close for even my taste. It was impossible to see a road, much less keep to it, and the chaise and horses simply wallowed their way through drifting snow and mud—slithered along, drifted and plunged and pitched like a ship rather than a carriage.

Therefore, I was n't so surprised when we stopped dead and the postboy, with water pouring about him, poked his head in at the window and screamed he could n't get on.

"We 'd best turn off and put up some're!"

I was as wet as he, for the snow had found its way into the chaise, and I sat in a river of it and looked like a kind of waterspout.

I told him to stop where he pleased, but to put some quickness into it unless he wanted me to turn into an iceberg. He muttered something about a "bit of a village somewhere around," and we struggled on our way again.

Where we went, or how, I could never say. But we seemed to curve somewhere, and the wind to veer

a little, and then come straight at us to clutch at that lumping snow and batter it dead and sure into the drenched faces of those poor brutes of horses; I could feel them clawing with their sodden feet and rocking against each other for some foothold, and by the Lord! that boy must have been a marvel to have got them down that lane! First one lamp went—then the other; and now without one jolt of light we staggered and stumbled our miserable way. Any moment and I expected we should be lifted clean off the ground and swirled abroad by that terrific wind—any second I expected us to be reduced to mere fragments, maimed and broken by its pitiless strength. And it was exactly as I was giving myself up to this forlorn imagination that, with a sharp, twisting crack, one of the rickety windows smashed into bits and I was spitting beneath a cloud of snow and fragments of broken glass. I thought this was the end and so it was, but different from my idea. We stopped dead, and I could dimly see a bit of a light—I could even smell—unmistakable, certain, the sea.

Well, it was an inn, a cheerless, evil-looking place, with a toothless hag of a woman and a white-faced, sly-looking devil of a boy—her son. They could give me a bed, but that was all. I said I smelled the sea. I was pretty nearly standing in it. It slushed about their kitchen and, together with the snow, drowned every vestige of fire they'd ever had. Apparently this was nothing in the the coast villages on the Fens. You see, they had sprung up on little or no decent founda-

tion, and with virtually no shelter from sea or dike. And they were queer stubborn folk, those who lived in them, snarling against all idea of progress, preferring apparently the sea in their cottages and flood over their lands. Superstition it may have been, or possibly laziness. They clung doggedly to their moving fisheries and wild shootings; it was sufficient for them. So when the farming folk gradually came down from the hills when the Government began to drain the marshes, their bitterness reached uncomfortably high. It came to fighting on some parts of the coast and they had to let the soldiers loose; then gradually gave in savagely and sullenly, like beasts being tamed—then of a sudden lashing out,

But all this I learned later on. For the moment here I was in this boat of an inn, and I might have been in that chaise for all the comfort it could offer. It was no use arguing with those two who bossed it: they saw nothing unusual in a puddle for a fire, and I suppose what was sufficient for them was for me, or any other passer-by.

After a lot of muttering they gave me a good dose of rum, which I swallowed down eagerly enough, you may be sure, and followed the unhealthy-looking son to the room they had to offer me—a barn of a place this, with a barn of a bed and the usual pool for the hearth; but by this time I was used to such little pleasantries, and even the cracked window, hitched as it was by cord and wire, an easy leakage for the wet to trickle through, affected me but a little. It was their

custom, their notion of hospitality. I became greatly amused. My baggage was as wet as I, and the idea of a change was hopeless. I wrapped myself about in the one blanket and snuggled down into the immense mattress.

## 2

I wanted to sleep, and of course I could n't. I lay like a mummy in a kind of damp, hot sweat. I cursed the weather, I cursed the roads, I cursed the inn and its toothless owner and her fox of a son. I lay there cursing, and most of all I cursed myself. Here was I, half-way to rheumatic fever in a damned hut of a place, simply because I was an unsatisfied, discontented kind of vagabond. Restless, unpractical—devoid of all ambition, wandering off in a haphazard sort of way to a paltry position as drawing-master, in an equally paltry school in a strange town!

I had been—God knows what I had been—and even now I might still have had the energy to pull myself together instead of wrestling in so forlorn a fashion with the imbecile brains of imbecile youths!

How long I lay there trying to fathom the intricate state of my mind, and how long I might have so continued, there is no knowing. But in the middle of it all—with a weary non-committal air—that crazy case—ment dropped clean from its hinges and disappeared from view. I stared at the empty hole and pelting snow with blank despair. If the roof itself had fallen in I don't think I could have become more sodden and



wretched than I already was. Therefore, in one way, that open space meant very little; yet I scrambled out of bed and even peered into the bitter night to see if it had caught anywhere. Of course it had n't. And anyway, in that pitchy night I should n't have been able to see it at all. But there was something else that roused my interest the slightest. There was a glimmer of light—not steady, but moving and twisting—that told of a lantern; what was more, of some being the other end of it. It occurred to me then that my melancholy window very probably had paid a surprise visit to that lantern holder. I shouted down, with my hands around my mouth, some words of apology—explanation even. I gathered by the way the light was suddenly jerked upward that he had heard; what was more, he answered.

His words came scattered with the wind, I only got one here and there, and so far as I could make out they had nothing to do with my questioning. I merely caught them as they drifted by: "A ship . . . ashore . . . going to see . . . no chance. . . ." And the light twisted and bickered its way.

I remained at that gaping window-frame and tried to follow the drift of that shaken lantern, while into my wet mind and sodden brain every bit of curiosity I had stirred sullenly to life again. "A ship . . . ashore . . . going to see . . . no chance. . . ."

Enchantment! That was it. Magic behind each one of those words! And I knew then it was impossible to think any more of sleep or rest. I just



stood on at that opening and screwed my eyes to mere points to try and find out further meaning to those scattered sentences.

The wind seemed to have died down somewhat, but not the snow. Perfectly noiseless it dropped, flake clinging to flake so there was not the breadth of a finger between any one of them; and in the blackness of the night the purity of their color seemed to stand out more than ever. My spokesman had vanished, yet even as I peered light came.

A flaring, lop-sided blaze of a light that told of a torch, and the steadier, more forlorn glimmer of a lantern. And then others—patchy, moving. For one instant as I stared all those lights were bunched together. Patient lights, patiently waiting, danced and twisted by the wind. Yellow and red with redder sparks torn wildly from them. To bow and courtesy—to go and be seen again, now as nothing by that vaunting wind, now stretching defiant tongues to scorch the falling snow and glare heavenward. And, as suddenly, to separate, and dodge and flicker unevenly away.

What was their secret? What was their errand? Who were the men who bore them, and for what purpose? A ship! What ship? What game of chance were these torch-bearers up to? At that moment there was no thought of hesitation. I dropped the steaming blanket I had still caught around me, took up the guttering candlestick, and made my way downward. The inn seemed wrapped in profound

silence, and I wondered whether its pleasant owners were enjoying a better night's rest than I. In the big bar-parlor, or kitchen, I came across the old woman, sleeping her sleep as she fancied. She sat in a hard chair, her coarse frock lifted to cover her face and head, revealing a stained petticoat of yellow about her bony knees; her naked feet thrust in threadbare slippers paddling heedlessly on the wet bricks, her hands clasped as if in the attitude of prayer at her bosom; while from beneath this shroud her breath came harsh and resonant: sleep held her firmly. Not a pretty sight—and I turned away from her, and prepared to occupy myself with the door. That was easy. It was not securely caught, but merely on the latch. I opened it and slipped outside.

As I have said, the wind had dropped somewhat, but it was there sufficiently to make me blink as it drove the snow against my face. In one instant it had smothered my candle entirely, so that the hot wax ran about my hand. Even the murky light of the bar added to the impassable blackness of the night; the passing of the wind had brought about yet another sound: a grinding, rushing noise, with a snarl about its voice and a threat in its song. I knew then I was very close to the sea.

Obviously, I was in some street, and to make certain walked straight across until I touched a wall—and beneath clinging snow the hard wood that spoke of shutters. . . . And yet, wood or stone, there seemed no sign of human life, only that sullen sea and the

monotonous falling of the snow. It was toward the sea that those wavering lights had gone, and it was in their direction I very gingerly groped my way. I can promise no mountain climber was more cautious than I! There was reason enough for it. I trod in deep drifting snow, yet that was nothing, or very little; of far more import was the realization of its detestable slushiness, of its uncomfortable wetness—like heavy rain, like water. It *was* water: it was the sea itself breaking up that street, and I knew pretty shrewdly that every step of mine took me nearer it. Still, I was bent on seeking those tantalizing lights. I was bent on finding all the mysteries and excitements that surrounded that ship of whom only a passing word had been flung my way.

I was full of a fretful impatience against delay, and the delay in this case because of my complete ignorance: I had no real idea where to go, or what I had best do. It seemed pretty certain to me this street must end directly at the sea, or harbor, or shore, or whatever it might be. And somewhere about there, those lights and men must have gone—for all I knew were at this moment adventuring about their business.

And then it was, as I groped and clung to slippery snow-covered walls, I came up against something else. I clutched hold of stuff that was most decidedly waterproof. . . . I kept my hold, and it was returned by cold, wet fingers—which seemed against my throat unpleasantly soft. I think I knew the owner of the oilskins and unhealthy hands before he guessed who

or what I was. He said, and his face was so near mine I could smell the drink in his breath:

“Who ’m you?”

I told him. “What do you think? A ghost? What do you expect? Excise men?”

I felt his fingers loosen as if he would bolt and run. I held on all the more to the slippery coat. I wanted a guide, and I had one near at hand and did not intend to lose him. I answered impatiently:

“Come, come, man; feel me if you can’t see! If you’re an innkeeper you should have some memory for your visitors.”

He took my suggestion, working his clammy fingers about me in a decidedly unpleasant manner. I felt them groping at my coat and my shoulders, at my face, so that I bristled with discomfort, for they were so hideously fish-like. It was not until he found my beard and the trim of it that he appeared at all relieved. He muttered:

“Different to us. You came by chaise this evening?”

“I did. To your inn, I rather fancy.”

His reply was lost at my feet, and I found by the sudden glimmer of a light he had a lantern with him which, in some way, he set going, and stood up with it, spluttering at his side. I asked:

“What’s this of a ship? Is there one—or rather a rescue on hand?”

He mumbled: “What if there is?”

I said very cheerfully: “Why, nothing, except that my curiosity would have me see it.”

Such an idea obviously did n't meet with his approval. He stamped uneasily as he stood and stuttered some jumble about "danger" and "surefootedness," and "no place for any gentleman."

I said: "You should n't discourage me, young man; the more you ply that sort of talk the more you rouse my zeal! You should make it more comfortable for your guests if you 'd have them remain in their beds."

He said with the deepest suspicion: "What 's it to do with you up there?"

By "up there" I guessed he meant some place or other along the shore where the rest of the men had gone, and where I longed to be.

I said rather impatiently: "Have you only met cut-throats or spies all your life that you 're so infernally suspicious? Why, you 'll make me think you 're doing murder or pillage at least, if you go on in this non-sensical manner."

My words hit true, for he fairly jumped into the air at my mention of plunder. I had it now clear enough. It was not so much a rescue these men were after, but a matter of pillage before the coast-guards came along. A matter of spirits and anything of goodly value, to pass well away from the hands of the law, into the cellars of this young man who owned the inn. It had its humorous side, and I confess I was chuckling as I saw him cringe. I went on very pleasantly:

"Don't you think you 'd better lead the way? You know there 's nothing to prevent my slipping from you



now and whispering a few words to the custom-folk at Boston. I should do remarkably well for myself in the long run; better than you, I fancy."

He said hoarsely: "I could settle that before you turned!"

I told him mildly, listening the while to the chatter of his teeth: "I very much doubt it. Your hands are too soft, mine too hard. Besides you forget the postboy will be full of questionings. Now I care nothing for your plunderings or your morals, but I care quite a lot to gratify this whim of mine. You can help me that much, and for all you know I may be able to help you quite a lot. Well, what do you think?"

He turned without a word and led the way.

### 3

As I thought, we weren't so very far from the sea edge. There came a sudden slope and the crunching noise of shingle and mud beneath one's feet—some attempt at a harbor or gangway for boats to slide up on—and then my guide turned sharp to the left and we had water above our ankles, and sea-sprayed snow stinging our faces. This, as I discovered later, was the bit of sea-wall the place boasted of. An affair of mud and stone plastered all anyhow together and running a quarter of a mile each way, but crazy enough toward the end and breaking away helplessly into the sand and mud. We groped our way along this until there came one of these sudden gaps, and so upon

those distracted lights and a small group of men. I heard one of them shout out:

"Some one with you, Grainger?"

And my guide went up to them. It did n't interest me what he said, and I merely waited, until one separated himself from the others and came along to me. He swung his lantern on high to see me the better.

"And what's this?" he demanded. "Who be you?"

I have but to shut my eyes now, and I can see that man even as I saw him that night, and never in my life was to see him again. He was not so very tall, but the girth of him was terrific: he must have had the strength of seven bulls in those shoulders, and the grip of seven men in those huge hands of his. He was browner than any man I had ever seen, and his gray mustache stood out like a shimmering spear along his lip; he wore a jersey, with no other covering from the storm, and wore it with the same air as an emperor his royal trappings. His tremendous boots came up above his knees, and he had that free fierce walk such as a savage has, paying no heed for any obstacle in his path, but removing it—because it was there and it hindered him. It was pretty obvious that I was no more to him than any bramble or snarling cub, and that he would have removed me with as much ease and as little thought as with them. But his face fascinated me, and as I stared up, back my thoughts were with my long-forgotten easel and my garret of paint and muddle. . . . I muttered beneath my breath:

"O Lord, how I would like to paint you!" Then I said aloud: "Let me watch here awhile; I'll not worry you."

He said slowly: "I'm thinking you have eyes to see."

I told him: "They have a trick of closing when need be—so have my ears of shutting up!"

I thought I noticed the slightest quiver to the enormous mustache; and the big slow voice answered me: "And your tongue?"

"It does but follow!"

He looked me up and down with as much care as a farmer some beast.

"Then keep well away: w'n enough to do wi'out strangers."

And turning on his heel went back to the others. And I wished then with all my heart I could have lived their life: there was something rather remarkable in their simplicity. They were just primitive folk and they lived in their own primitive manner. Life and death were one and the same. One man paid his toll to the sea and another took his place. Some woman dried her eyes and watched her child slip easily to the father's seat. It is likely or not they worshiped God—likely or not they had their own wondering knowledge of the universe. They saw their God in the sea, and it is certain, was He pagan or divine, they fought their battles with Him and for Him. Paid their sacrifices and offered their worship. God of the Old Testament, they watched his wrath and took heed of His passion.



Christ of the New, they took food from His hands and marveled at His judgment. That was their way. And I, standing apart with all about me supreme evidence of Supreme Godhead, envied these men and their simplicity, envied their secret whisperings, wondering at the mystery that was all about them and their business.

In the pitchy darkness they had been cut away from all action. They had heard the muffled appeal of a gun and seen the blurred flare of a rocket. Somewhere in that darkness there was a ship, and with all manner and kind of tragedy. Somewhere . . . it was for them to wait for some vague sign of dawn. They had no boat, for the sea had ruthlessly claimed them as her own. They had a great coil of rope only; it would be about now the tide would be on the turn. Sullenly the sea was changing: it needed but some sign of the lifting of that black curtain. . . .

It was a startled dawn. Like a frightened child it came its creeping way, only half awake, only half assured. The faintest glimmer of silver, a mere pale slit in that vast canopy of darkened sky. To stretch,—like a lazy child will stretch,—trembling arms gleaming, yet hesitating, as if in apology for what the world might see of the riot of the night.

There was nothing to see. That great wilderness of water raged and leaped in perfect solitariness. Of ship there was no sign; of life or wreckage there was no semblance. From where we stood, right away to where that shimmer of light balanced timidly on the

very edge of those mouthing white-topped waves, there was nothing but sea, nothing but mystery—mystery because of the untold secrets she had stored away in her belly.

At that blank stretch of muttering water some of the men began to swear softly.

I heard the whining voice of my friend the inn-keeper, fretful and discontented.

“Been hanging about here too long—that ’s what we ha’ done! What ’s t’ good of waiting an’ looking? A bit o’ quickness and we might ha’ got something. Idling, that ’s what ye do: fair sick it makes me!”

One man shook his torch in the other’s face so that the sparks of it singed his eyes.

“Say that again,” he roared, “an’ I ’ll chuck you to the sea as extra food for her gullet! Idling? What o’ you? Living on our hands, sucking from our blood—that ’s your tricks, you mealy-mouthed swipe!”

A thin, lanky fellow, with great red hands like raw meat and a habit of constant and steady spitting, here sent a spurt of yellow juice well in the direction of the pallid Grainger with the drawling remark:

“Not tasty enough bait for the fishes: let him get back to his cellars and his mother’s bosom! There ’s no liquor here, and if there was you wouldn’t have it! Get back to your kennel, puppy-dog.”

From the appreciative attitude of the others I began to think it was time he did clear off. For my part I would have entirely relished his ducking. He was a particularly nasty type—sucking and cringing all

in one breath. Squirming through life and squeaking like a pettish child against the pricks. I wondered how these tough men put up with him, but later I understood. His inn, you see, was an easy refuge in more ways than one. I learned more of that as time went on.

It was in the middle of all this trifling with the unspeakable Grainger that there came a sudden interruption from the big man. Prince as he was among them, he stood apart, hands on hips, body slightly bent, the skin on his face all puckered about his eyes: he stood thus silhouetted against the glittering morning sky staring straight ahead of him. He said now, loudly and clearly and with perfect assurance:

"There's something out there!" And pointed.

We crowded around him, pushing and jostling, each one of us trying to follow the gesture of his arm, making futile remarks—seeing nothing.

"Whereabouts?"

"There's nothing there!"

"Skipper's eyes are sure enough! What d'yer see, then?"

"Can't be anything!"

"Might be, though! What do you make of it, Skip?"

And the big man's placid, contemptuous voice: "Blind are you then? Where that great white-topped fellow dips! Watch now. . . . There! A-top of it!"

It seemed sheer impossibility that the eye could find

in that hammering sea of shadows and froth any such thing that could be marked as something separate and individual from it. And yet one man had seen some unknown object which was utterly indistinguishable on my part, at all events.

And then, quite suddenly, with many grunts and ejaculations, it was spied by the rest. It did n't give them any particular pleasure. They had hung about there long enough, and if an entire ship had gone, what rubbish could be left by that infuriated storm? They eyed the Skipper (it was evident he was their leader) doubtfully, and stood about uneasy and sullen. He said bluntly:

"We maun chance it," which made them growl despondently.

"Tide's well on t' turn! It's heavy work for any old rot."

"It's a ruddy risk, Skip. There be no good left out there!"

The spear-like mustache seemed more stiff and stabbing than ever: he gave it a great tug at either end, and in that tug I could see the iron of his fist and brain, which ruled these men and used its cunning against the sea. He said very savagely and determinedly:

"None o' mine then are ye! Not one o' ye, by God! I'll ship a new hand with this gentleman" (this with a jab of his finger at me) "and leave ye to suckle where ye can but not wi' my boats—by Christ, no!"

Some of them went red at that, and all of them

shuffled sheepishly; the very lanky man, spurring a thin jet from him, muttered moodily:

"Aw, now, Skipper, reckon we 're wi' ye. What 's a do?"

"T' rope," he told them shortly. "Come, spin it out."

They were uncommonly cold by now, and, big men as they were, I doubt if any one of them had the indomitable grit of their leader. The rope they carried was sodden and clumsy as were their fingers. It was like a dead thing, and they half dead, trying to put some life into it and themselves. They twisted it around each man and straightened it as best they could between them. They had not even started on their business, yet it cut their skin and tore their nails and bit into their flesh. With the exception of the Skipper they were uncommonly sick, and he all hot blood at the prospects of a fight. They left their lights with Grainger, and he and I stood, dripping and frozen, and watched them set about the matter.

It was just a shadow of a thing they were after. Just the vestige of some shape flung about and twisted from wave to wave. It might have been something, yet more certainly it might have been nothing. Yet their lives were to be pitted against that howling sea on the pure game of chance—possibility.

With the big man at their head they edged down into the water, digging with their feet for support, bracing their numbed bodies against each hurling wave.



It was n't so far out, that shadow, that it could not be caught at. But they were merely two-legged individuals of simple flesh and blood. And the sea was a live, vigorous thing, a maddened monster with all the heat of ten thousand devils. Yet they went into it; followed their leader like sheep, stumbled and fell and were up again; ducked and pitched and swallowed and spat—were entirely beneath the sea and were snarling on top of it, were gone and were there and struggling on further—all in quest of that shadow.

Oh, yes, and they got it. With their own blood reddening the rope, and their feet dragged from beneath them,—their breath pumped from their bodies, the water weighing them down,—yet they clutched it, tore at it, grappled and fought with it, and brought it back—a mere bit of broken spar, a lump of tattered tarpaulin and rope—a rotten, useless thing, but theirs—back from the sea.

We helped them—that pallid youth and I—back to where we had waited and beyond that to where the water was less and scattered islands of grass and sand were beginning to show. They sat about then and rubbed and squeezed at their bruised limbs and tried to win back some of the exhausted breath that had been ruthlessly dragged from them. . . . Sat there as if they could never rise again—and not one of them looked toward the bundle of wretchedness they had so nearly spent their lives for. . . . Not one of them. And then, with extraordinary suddenness, the Skipper bent down and began to tear the stuffs

away from the wood. They stared disinterested at him; one made some remark, "Some one's washing, fur sure." Yet no one laughed, and when the big man demanded, "A knife, one o' ye quick now!" some one got it out without a comment.

They sat and watched him, and I with them. Sodden stuffs, all sorts and kinds, a bit of petticoat, a blanket, an oilskin coat and so on to the very last, when there came to view—sodden and pinched and twisted of limb, yet blinking—a bit of a child, a tiny thing, struggling weakly for the breath that was nearly choked out of it—yet, even as we stared, let out a sob of a cry.

Was ever fate so mad? What comedy, what drama could be compared to this? Where there had been a ship, there was this! Where there had been men, there was this poor atom! From the unknown to the unknown! From secret and mystery to more secret and mystery. Bringing nothing, and coming to nothing; questioning surely, yet questioning himself! What sort of life behind him? What, in God's name, before him? Mere nothingness to mere nothingness!

The way you see Andrew started on his adventures.

## CHAPTER II

### I

**M**YSTERIOUS, that was it, and you can't challenge the word: you can't question its connection with this waif. He was mystery itself, and he came to mystery. He brought it with him and he walked right into it. All life is obscure, secret. The very wheel revolves on a question. Whence? Whither? Why? Fog-bound we stare into space and mark out our route. Follow it out, track it down, choose the path we prefer, and gild it to our snug purpose. And yet there is the fog sure enough: at the grave we swallow it in great gulping breaths! Whence? Whither? And why? Mystery, mystery. And this scrap of derelict childhood arrived on the very waves of it.

Where man had not survived, where timber and sail had gone—yet this one small thing remained! There had been a woman once who had held him to her breast: there had been some man who had played with him: there had been some love in his life, some mother-worship. That was finished. The very womb of the sea had cast him on the shore and taken into itself all that had once mattered to him. Why spare such a help-



less mite as this? Why suck under so terrific a mouthful and leave this poor morsel?

Mysterious—wonderful! I tell you you cannot challenge the word, it encompassed him too securely, it belonged to him—it *was* his from the first: he adventured forth, wrapped in it, and knowing it even as he lay in swaddling clothes! More than that. Within the week that he had found refuge, he was to know desolation, to be outcast. To have a taste of that remarkable thing we call human nature, life.

It was the Skipper who took compassion on him that fatal night and carried him back to his own home. He had sought for him, put his strength against that of the sea, and won this unknown from its depths. His compassion was as big as his power. He extended it to the child; he brought his wife to look kindly enough on it. Once again fate. Once again a turn of the wheel, and the unknown was out in the unknown again. Why? Human nature, for one thing. For the other, something bigger than the Skipper even. Picture this man if you can, the very epitome of health, the very ideal of strength! I would have painted him and called it Power; I would have painted him and called it Might; I would have painted him and called it Courage! All this and more he seemed to me, to the wishes of my poor brush. All of them indeed he was, and yet none of them! Death, you see, woke suddenly to notice him. Stretched one gigantic fist and plucked him by the middle, shook him gently and, with his usual smile, crushed the

breath from his body and tossed him—poor ghost of a thing—into the air, into space. Pneumonia, the doctor said. Cold from the wreck, and within a week of it they had put him beneath the ground and heaved earth upon him. Then it was that Ditchling showed fear. More than that, a kind of dread. Nearly fifty years had this big leader of theirs lived and dominated and spoken. Nearly fifty years and nothing had touched him.

Then, a new soul had come to Ditchling, and with it all those wondering questions. Whence? Whither? Why? An old soul had gone its way, and all about it those selfsame words: Whence? Whither? Why? Not for you and me to answer; with such things, in such events, there is no answer. But with these people—in their untutored, primitive minds there was but one thought. Ill luck had come from the sea. Ill luck, for with it came death. Thus it fell out that on the day the Skipper died the old parson of the place, stubborn and persistent man of God that he was, christened the waif, only to find when it was over that the child's refuge had been taken from him. The shutters of the dead man's cottage were closed, the door barred. What was more, every cottage throughout the place was so bolted and closed.

I met the old man, his head bare and his cassock fluttering in the breeze, a colored blanket held closely to him, striding up and down that white street, beating a furious crescendo of sound at every door and

getting no word in response—no sound, simply silence as of a tomb.

## 2

He was a particularly nice man, this rector. Sturdy and strong, both a fighter himself and a man of sympathy. But he had reckoned too much on the humanity of the small community that was his. All his labor and teachings had not lessened one jot of their own ideas and superstitions. His words might be the words of Christ Himself: they were as nothing to the belief deep rooted in their own hearts. He swung the burden slightly toward me as we met, and demanded with great vexation:

“Look down this street, Mr. Penrose. Could you believe there are women behind nearly every door, yet they will bolt and bar against a mite like this?”

I looked at the pitiful bundle and then at the narrow, silent street, very white and very still. Death in one of those cottages, life here and yet no room—no thought for that new, fresh young spirit.

I asked, “What do you make of it?”

He passed the child from one arm to the other. “Make of it? Stubborn minds, stubborn thoughts! Make of it——” He hammered again at the door nearest to him, and listened with me to the vibrating noise muttering down the street. “Listen to life battering at the door and watch for the answer.” He pointed to the chimney stacks, “Smoke—merely gray drifting of vapor.”

The child moved a little, and gave a little whimper. The old man pressed it with rough tenderness against his gown; his face softened the slightest as he remarked sadly :

“This means the workhouse for this poor wayfarer.”

I came a bit closer and caught a glimpse of it. Just the ordinary round little head with dark soft hair clinging to it, intensely blue eyes, and the faintest flush on the cheeks. I asked curiously :

“You’ve christened him?”

The old man nodded.

“To save any future doubts, and anyway he’s had a pretty big shock by his watery cradle.”

“What have you called him?”

The twist of a smile appeared on his face. “Oh, well,” he said, “I had a whimsical notion of giving him something fitting. Andrew because of my church, and Sartor because, well, we had to dress him, and I am inclined to think it would have tickled the scornful *Tufelsdröckh*. Here we have a naked boy; let us clothe him and see what manner of a man a coat and shirt will make him!”

I laughed with him, and asked, “Will you tell the result to Carlyle?”

“I know his answer. What does he say? ‘In that strange dream, how we clutch at shadows as if they were substances.’”

“Substances—look at this baby, already stretching his fists, eager in firm belief! He had been better left to

that hungry sea than that we should deck him out and send him in pursuit of shadows!"

There was a touch of irony about the matter, however you came to look at it. This salvation from death, and then with a curt apology an offer of life of a half-shriveled kind—to give him a coat and bid him make the best of it to couple his name with that of a saint and a cynic and let him work out his own damnation or happiness.

I walked with him to where his house stood ruddy and square beside the small and ancient church, and, as we were about to part, accepted his cordial invitation to go in for supper that night.

"Until the roads are easier, I shall have to get my housekeeper to take charge of this waif. She won't relish it much: it's a queer matter how very little there is of mother-love in this world."

And then, just as he turned toward his gate, he hesitated with the remark:

"Hullo, I wonder what Farmer Swinsco's doing down here?" and looked up the lane. I looked with him, and, though it was no business of mine, looked again.

There was a man coming down toward the village. Fascinating in his remarkable personality. He must have stood over six feet in height, and he had breadth and strength to go with it. His face was very thin and very hard—the skin burnt and beaten by wind and sun to a deep reddish brown in hue and drawn tightly

over his prominent cheek-bones, as one would spread parchment across a jam jar. His hair, where it showed, was thick and pitch-black, but—and this was what made him all the more remarkable—the huge beard which fell thick and straight to his waist was red, deep red. He wore a suit of velveteen with a check muffler round his throat and a flat, wide-brimmed hat.

He hardly listened to the rector's questioning cheerful "Good day to you." He asked at once in a brusque, clear voice:

"What's this of a child, parson? Likely you know?"

"Seeing I've christened it and seem to be nurse to it into the bargain, I know of it well, Swinsco."

He noticed the bundle the other held for the first time, and bent his great body toward it with certain curiosity.

"A boy?"

The rector nodded. "And it's the orphanage for him, poor beggar: that death of the Skipper seems to have turned the whole village crazy."

Swinsco repeated, "A boy, eh?" And bunched that gigantic beard in one hand and stared at it thoughtfully.

"Afraid of him, be they?"

"Afraid of themselves," retorted the other bitterly. "And Heaven only knows what else of beside!"

The farmer straightened himself and stared now at the rector.



"The workhouse, you say?"

"Seemingly," muttered the rector. "Seemingly."

"What if I have him?"

"Man alive!" came the surprised answer. "Why, you 've one on your hands already."

Swinsco replied with deep earnestness.

"That was the Lord's gift in the midst of my sorrow. There 's naught sentimental about *this*," and he pointed at the child. "But that lad o' mine, he was *put* in my way; he was sent to my barren heart. I 'm thinkin' I owe it to God to do something big with that gift of His! So I want him different, different to me and mine—I want him a gentleman with a gentleman's place about him! That 's where this stray comes in. His blood may be good blood, or may not, I 'll take the risk on that, but there 's no gentlefolk round here who 'll have to do with me or my folk yet. I want a companion for my lad—a playmate, to be wi' him, to grow up wi' him. For his sake, parson, that 's how I look at it. For my boy two of 'em helping each other, helping *him* better than one alone—you can see that?"

You call it pathetic—admirable. You are profoundly stirred by the faith so delicately wrapped about this man? Let that pass. For the moment, see him as I saw him like some dead and gone Isaac from lands beyond the Dead Sea, a crusader, a knight. For what man is more worthy of knighthood than he who stakes his all upon his simple faith?

I could see the rector was touched. He was puzzled,

too, how to answer. He stared up the blank and desolate street, and he stared down it; he pulled away the blanket from the child's sleeping face and peered down as it lay; he looked at me and obviously found no help there. He looked back again at Swinsco and sighed a bit, as if in that rough sturdy face he saw some sympathy.

"Why, why, this is very friendly of you; more than that, very fine—remarkably finely felt, Swinsco. You mean you 'll give this morsel a roof and a helping hand—is that your idea?"

The great red beard jerked violently.

"More than that, parson. He shall have as much as my lad excepting my heart. He shall learn as he learns, and speak every bit as fine as he shall find to speak. Just the same, ye see—and yet not quite, for my boy carries my name and my lands; the young one has his own, but I 'll see to it to gie him a start in life; that I swear before my God."

And he took that immense hat from his head and held it on high every bit as some old knight raised up his sword and then fell to his knees to worship.

The rector gently extended the bundle to the other.

"Here he is then," he said. "And the blessing from on high go with him and your work."

Swinsco took him with extraordinary gentleness and stared down on him so solemnly.

"It shall be a good thing, parson, good for him and good for each one of us. What I can give he shall have of me. I 'll put him on his way—teach



him to handle a plow and cut a clean furrow."

The rector pressed a little back on his heels, smiling slightly as if pleased with his day's work.

"I'll teach him the Bible, Swinsco, and of Latin and such good things!" said he.

And there it was that cursed jade Fate put excitement into my heart and eager words into my folly-loving mouth. I joined with these two now and cried:

"And I'll teach him color and romance and books. All good things, God helping me!"

Said, you see, and done! Flung from me without hesitation—promised and made ready. Was I right or was I wrong? Who can say? My answer, if there is one, you shall hear as I proceed. For the rest, here was young Andrew one more foot on his way, one further stride from the sea to the land, from his own solitude to the companionship of one young Ayerst Swinsco.

### 3

You, who are a city man, know nothing of the land. I, who in my wanderings have certain sympathy with the plains and the hills, only a trifle. My knowledge of the men who work thereon was merely passing; as time went on I was to know more; and as my knowledge grew I think the thing that stirred me most was their simplicity, their patience.

This man Swinsco. This perfectly simple man with his perfectly simple faith. Yet about him, even as

the earth stretches, so does his story. There was no questioning with him; there was no hesitation. There was perfect love and boundless belief. His knowledge was nothing, save of his beasts and his land; his traveling of no account, excepting the length of his boundaries. But his faith was marvelous, better than mine. Stars and wind and greenery were as one with him. The moods of the earth and the moods of his God—all a part of his quiet existence.

From a child he had known such things. From his mother's apron-strings he had grown with them. Wet and fine, storm or sun, it was one and the same to him. Each day was a working day, each season a working season. A planting and a reaping, a rearing to life and a cutting down. And then, as he grew to manhood, so one day, like Isaac of old, he went into his own land and sowed his own seed. Nothing to you and me, less still to some people. But think awhile. That land and the marvel of it. How does a man build a house, a palace, a cathedral? Watch how it grows, extends, shoots up. From mere mud and filthiness to clay and plaster; from the clay to brick and timber; from the brick to doors and roof. Complete, finished. And the men who see it grow beneath their fingers can stand aside and stare on it proudly, standing in all its glory. So it was with his farm.

A bit of land and wooden shed, to design, to plant, to dig, to prepare, to make good. To stand away and look at it in all its wealth of crops and beasts and know it for yours. Hands, brain, courage. These his tools

and no others. Of lesson-books he knew nothing. His own scent and touch and sight guided him his way—taught him the meaning of right and wrong. That was sufficient. And then, just when he was getting steadily to his feet, just as Mellow Farm was beginning, he fell in love.

She was pretty, this girl—a young slip of a thing full of pretty shy ways, and soft in her voice. And Swinsco, who had regarded women as mysterious creatures, keeping well out of their way, considered her most wonderful, most marvelous. And when she showed him her simple books, and read passages from the "Gazette" to her parents, his wonder grew, his whole strength fell away from him. He reasoned dully, she was as far above him as the stars the earth, and he as clumsy as any young colt beside its graceful mother. . . . See him then, think if you can of him, great hulking man as he was, muttering his misfortune to the village school master . . . and then later on spending quiet evenings at the old school-house, bewildered and awkward, spelling out laboriously those queer old sentences, "Sam is up, Ned is out." . . . Lean with him as he leans perplexed and dazed over some grubby slate, contorting his poor brain most dreadfully with "Twice two are four." This Isaac of the fields with his lesson-books! Wonder of a man! Wonder of a love! And yet it is not education that will teach a man to say, "I love you," and the woman to whisper, "O my dear!" These two, then, with their faith, their simplicity; and I can picture his pride later

on when the evenings before their marriage their two young heads would be bent over the prayer-book, while he with her help stumbled through the service.

Later on—well, what did it matter? How could it? Her time with him was the sweetest thing he had ever known. Then she died. And that which she had brought into the world, that which was to have been their joy and their pride, she took away with her. Sowing and reaping once again, you see!

Now, you are all bewilderment, all hotfoot with questions! If the child was dead, who was the boy? Who was this Ayerst? Simply the answer to his barren heart, simply the sound proof of his faith! He found the child. It was left in his lambing sheds on the wolds. There was, I understand, some pitiful note with it, and later still some poor soul was discovered, dead or dying, right away in the hills. Anyway, she was buried in the workhouse cemetery at Lincoln, and it was supposed there was some connection between her and the baby.

That did n't matter to Swinsco; what did matter was this foundling, this new hope in his life. She was dead, she and the joy that was to have been theirs. Right down in his heart there would always be a great hole that nothing but death itself could fill up. But if with the one hand God had taken away, with the other He had given! There was no doubt, no questionings in the man's heart. He was certain, he was assured. In this strange haphazard way God had touched him. So he christens the child. Gives him

his own name and calls him Ayerst. So had his wife's people been called.

And it was on this boy he built his dream. Father and son they were to be to each other, and had the blood been the same no man could have been prouder of his child. Not only son, but more than that—gentleman. Farmer Swinsco's gentleman son! Marvelous words! To inherit not only the farm but position, respect such as a gentleman should have. And when he added and bought and extended to the farm he was adding and buying and extending for young Ayerst. So that in years to come people might say: "Mellow Farm, fine place, fine land—the biggest in these parts. . . . Swinsco's place, young Swinsco's, y' know. Great place I can tell you! Great chap young Swinsco, great *gentleman!*"

Most of us who are anything have our thoughts centered about some thing, fact, or purpose. Most of us work round some pivot, some thought. And old Farmer Swinsco had the beginning and the end of his whole existence centered about this boy, this foundling, Ayerst. You may sniff at the pathos in it, but I—I scented only the tragedy! And I have often wondered since those red-hot days if some unknown, un-understood instinct of mine already smelled it out even as I stood in the snow with the rector and Swinsco, and laid on my pledge for this scrap of a thing who was to go up to Mellow Farm and learn gentlemanly ways for the sake of this prince of gentlemen—young Ayerst!



## CHAPTER III

### I

NEVERTHELESS, I did not immediately carry out my promise. I could be of little use to Andrew the infant; it would be with the boy—the youth—I should be concerned. So for something like eight years I drifted here, there, and everywhere, with occasional glances at Ditchling, until, in my usual hurried way, I went off to South America. It is sufficient to say my doings out there have nothing to do with this story. I was away about four years; I got back in the summer of 1848—Andrew must have been about fourteen or so. Things happen in such a time, and I found on my return too much had happened for my liking.

To begin with, my old friend the rector was dead.

And nothing I suppose could have been more tragic than his end. Certain newly fixed sluice gates at that part of the land freshly recovered and partly owned by old Swinsco had done their damndest. Crashed beneath a storm one night, flooded the land, and drowned, not only beasts and crops, but the rector himself. . . . That hit Swinsco hard—harder than he had ever guessed he could be hit; game as he was, something

must have snapped that ghastly night—and the morning they brought him back, sodden and helpless, from those maimed fields—from his friend's body. . . . A stroke, the doctor had said, a paralytic seizure. Not completely, for while his brain was active enough the lower part of that immense body was helpless; he depended on a wheeled chair to get him about the place.

Well, I was told this by the new, thin, prim rector who had stepped into the living; who dismissed the tragedy with an impatient look at his watch. It was nothing to him, I suppose. After all, why should it be? He could not know my thoughts, see my vision—a never-faded one of that kindly bluff old preacher, his dingy gown, black and fluttering against the heavy snow, full of perplexities about the sprawling infant he held so close to him. Could not see, and never would, three men take an oath about its little body! Three men! And one had gone his silent way, and one was mere wreckage! Seemingly there was but I, and what good could come through my poor vow? Obviously, nothing by losing time where I was not wanted. I muttered a few words that I do not imagine were heard, and set my face away from the village toward the farm.

## 2

Have I ever explained Ditchling? It's as well you should know the lie of the place and realize the rather curious fact that there were actually two villages—Ditchling "Old," and, as they called it, Ditchling

"New." The old part was that at the edge of the sea, running virtually into it, and containing simply a narrow street of cottages with a queer jumble of nets, boots, oars, jerseys, caps, and barefooted children about the door-steps. Then you'd see a stretch of marsh land; sudden pools of water, yellow patches of gorse, and thick clumps of coarse grass, with the church and the rectory abruptly in the middle—and farther on, in a kind of a semicircle, cottages and barns sprawling around a sort of pocket-handkerchief of a green with a battered well in the middle. Ditchling "New," and the so-called agriculture part of the place.

There is always, I fancy, a kind of "smell" or "taste" about any town, and whereas it is almost to be expected in some of the larger ones, there is something faintly humorous when you sniff it out in a tiny hamlet. Thus it was in these two bits of villages boasting not more than a hundred-odd men and women, separated by less than half a mile, and yet as foreign to each other as a dog to a cat! In the one you saw fish—you smelled fish, you trod on fish; in the other your senses were pleasantly enticed by wonderful scents of newly baked bread, of grain and oats, of stable and piggery; there were hens all about the green and ducks with plenty to say; the heat of the forge on the one side and a combined cobbler's and saddler's on the other; there was everything in fact that in a small important manner spoke of the earth, just as in Ditchling "Old" there was everything that spoke harshly and brazenly of the sea. And though they bought fish and



milk the one from the other, yet I am inclined to think there was precious little love between the two. And yet they were from the same parts. From the Wolds and from the Fens. Lincolnshire all through. Surely of the same blood and yet all signs of a division.

At the top of the village ran the road down which I had traveled so many years back on the wings of that storm which had led me to strange things.

Centuries ago those Fen men must have built on these marshes, in their clumsy manner, some kind of protection, some sort of roof for themselves and their folk; so gradually, as time went on, they must have pushed their way farther afield and battered some sort of track across the swamps until they came in touch with others of their kind. Time had n't helped them overmuch. True, it had brought stone where there had once been wood, clay where there had been mud; but the road was n't so very different. Different people and different methods passed that way, yet for all the reclaiming of the land it remained nothing more than a rough, twisting thing of mud and sand joining up other such villages as Ditchling, and swelling to some importance when it reached Wainfleet on the one hand and Boston on the other. Tilling Road, they called it, and Tilling Dike that which freshly flowed at the right side, and Tilling Plain the land that lay about it.

You crossed both road and dike to reach Mellow Farm, and cut away up a narrow lane through country as flat as the palm of my hand, until, after a mile or

so, you started to climb a goodish bit and reached the farm—beyond the farm lay Spilsbury.

Nearly all that land was Swinsco's. He had pushed his way farther and farther toward the village, until, immediately it was ready, he took over the newly drained land topping the dike. Made it his and made it perfect only in one terrific moment to lose it. I passed it now, scarred and broken, torn and desolate; with trees uprooted lying like dead things in the great hollows that their weight had smashed in! Sudden huge holes these, some already sprouting with weed and fungus, others silent with stagnant water and slime. Here and there tossed planks and odd tiles, silent memorials of some barn or shed. Here and there scarlet poppies sadly drooped, searching, it would seem, for the friendly corn now dead nothingness far beneath the earth, quivering silently against each other as if ashamed of their naked loneliness.

Yet, farther afield, there were signs that old Swinsco had started afresh another struggle. It might be a losing game, it might be a winning one; yet one thing was certain—he was going on with it, was ready to fight afresh, battle with it, wrestle with it. Sea or flood or tempest, he would put his back to the wall and meet them gamely.

So hereabouts it stretched on either side in fine, clean furrows or fresh green pasture, until it joined with the sloping ground that spoke of Swinsco's old domain.

## 3

Mellow House Farm was just the kind of place a farm should be, and just the kind some old and worthy squire might have known. You went up a bit of a drive with huge trees, like wise and ancient sentinels guarding it, smooth enough lawn about the house itself, yet a comfortable scratching-place for hens and ducks, and then beyond the house, great barns, stables, cow-sheds, and other yards, and beyond them still a drowsy old orchard, scenting the air with wild flowers, hot ripe fruit and blossom, and forever the murmur of homely bees, yellow with pollen. The house itself was square and red, with ivy twisting about the chimney stacks and the old bottle-glass windows. There was a big clamped door right on the drive, but that was hardly ever used. It was just a thing for state affairs; for the present it remained shut with trails of creeper about its rust-covered iron bell. It was to the side door leading direct to the big kitchen you went for entrance, and it was here I knocked and waited.

With a sudden clatter of pans and a scuffle of list slippers a woman came toward me, and, I confess, entirely took me aback; so I stood like some kind of idiot with dropping jaw.

You see, she was a stranger to me, and somehow of a totally different kind from what I had expected at Mellow Farm. There had been, when I was last

there, an old and uncommonly pleasant person, who acted as a kind of housekeeper to Swinsco and the boy. I should have well remembered her kindly face, but this person left me blank. To begin with, her whole person was almost grotesque. She was remarkably short and remarkably round; her face matched her hoop-like appearance, as did her unusually small bright eyes; in fact, she was the roundest thing I had ever seen. She showed no sign of a neck,—it all seemed part of this intense rotundity,—while from the way she walked, in an almost circling manner, she reminded me of a top. As time went on I realized I was n't so far wrong, for she was a creature who buzzed and hummed through life. Not in a pleasant sort of way, but with an interfering incessant tone—always on one note . . . and that was an uncommonly shrill one.

We both stared at each other, she and I, and I am pretty sure we immediately made up our minds how very mutual our dislike was. Then I asked if I could see Farmer Swinsco, to which she replied in her buzzing voice he was somewhere in the fields. I could see she wanted to be rid of me, but I was n't to be so speedily finished with in this way. I asked quickly:

“Andrew, then, young Andrew, is he anywhere about?”

Really it was extraordinary the suspicion that seemed to bristle out of her at my mention of Andrew. She jerked forward her round head sharply:

"And who may you be, coming along here after young Andrew?"

It was no use trying to be on one's dignity with such a bag of crossness; the only thing was to humor her. I answered very politely:

"My name's Penrose—Treeves Penrose. No, I don't suppose you know much of me. When I was here last, Mrs. Flock was housekeeper; but I know Andrew, knew him from the earliest of his days here, and I count Farmer Swinsco as my friend. So I hope to see one of them if not both. May I wait?"

She blinked with remarkable rapidity, and replied: "There's been no Mrs. Flock here these five years. I'm a sister of the farmer's. *I live here!*"

She made this last remark with most crashing emphasis. Obviously there should be no doubt about it. Obviously, also, it was said for my benefit; it was in fact to have a most decided effect on me—to what end I do not know. I am afraid I disappointed her. I only thought how particularly trying it must be for the old man to have such a sister; and I found myself wondering at the curiously resentful manner she showed toward Andrew. I simply went on:

"I really would like to see the boy."

I saw her eyes gleam angrily, and I guessed my bluntness had found a mark. She muttered, "He's fetching in th' eggs."

I said, "Perhaps he won't be long?"

She grumbled then. "Oh, I'll fetch him; I'll send



him in," and pattered out into the yard toward one of the barns.

As I turned and watched her rotund personality sailing its angry way, scattering all over the place numerous hens and ducks and cats, and wabbling somewhat uneasily on the cobbles, I found myself wondering, "Now, I wonder what trouble you tow along beside you, and who the devil helps you with it?"

Then, because it was hot and I forever a remarkably rude fellow, I went into the cooler kitchen.

It would have charmed your eye, that jolly big place of rough red brick and gay chintz curtains. A great long room with a window at one end and a kind of back kitchen at the other. It had a huge monk's-table right up the center, its great age bearing such a mellow polish, all lop-sided at one end and nicely worm-eaten. There were rows of pewter tankards on the shelf and chunky bits of bacon hanging from the heavy blackened beams, a collection of guns and whips and old harness in one corner, an enormous barrel of beer, with an ancient toby jug of brightest blue, in the other. There was a big rounded settle on one side of the vast open hearth, with a somewhat tattered sheepskin rug flung over its back; and it was here I sprawled myself out, and drank in all the pleasantness of the room and waited for Andrew.

He was not so very long in coming, and from the moment he rushed in I knew him. There was so much to happen in those grim days to come—so much that did happen: yet the events of any one of them could

never blot from my memory that first meeting with young Andrew. A most poignant recollection of that hot August day with the sun gleaming saber-like through that old room, and young Andrew, like some fresh eager warrior, bursting in on it!

Alive, that was the first thing you noticed in him! Brimming with life, breathing and speaking of it, loving it and living for its wonderful sake. Looking older than his age, he carried his fine young head well away from his body, and beautifully balanced on his strong brown throat: with his arms thrust away from his sides he had an unusually fearless expression, like that of boxers and sailors. His eyes were immensely blue and his hair wonderfully black; he was thin, but of that thinness that shows so marvelously the grace of youth, the wonderful freedom of young limbs.

There is a saying that you can see the heart from the eyes, and I tell you as I looked at Andrew I saw it hot and keen; staring out into the world swiftly poised, ready for flight—to any sort and any kind of adventuring that might be his.

Even as I stared at him and wondered at the great knots that had so suddenly gathered in my throat, he had crossed the room and was clutching at me, fairly crying:

"So you *have* come! How jolly, jolly glad I am to see you!"

I said there were knots in my throat, and I tell you there were so many of them I could but grip back at those strong young hands and think a hundred

thoughts! And that was how we met again, young Andrew and I.

I said at last, "Good Lord, young man, how you've grown!"

And he grinned all over his young, jolly face, and strutted tremendously on his toes, crying: "Oh, well, you know, you've been away long enough! Why, I'm fourteen now!"

Terrific age! And terrific the pride of youth! I said: "Fourteen, eh? And what have you been up to in all those years?"

He twinkled back grandly, "Oh, lots of things."  
"Good or bad?"

He punched me gently with his brown fists. "A bit of both, I expect."

We laughed then, and I began to fill my pipe, watching him the while as the sun twisted about his thick hair, starting little ruddy points in it and flushing his skin. I let my eyes glance about him at their leisure, marking him down inch by inch as a man choosing a horse and seeing to it that nothing escapes him. I remember that day he had on a dark blue cotton shirt open wide at the throat, with the sleeves turned right up to the shoulder, short buff-colored knickers, and naked legs and feet, thrust into rough shoes. I went on with my questioning:

"Still go to school?"

He nodded. "There'll only be another year of it though."

"Glad or sorry?"



He wriggled a little. "Both ways, I think! I like history and geography—I simply hate sums! But best of all I like getting out!"

"And playing the young man, eh?"

There came a sudden look into his eyes that I can only best describe by saying it reminded me of the expression you will sometimes see on the faces of sailors or men away from England for long years—just nearing her coasts. A look that has with it extraordinary hope and wondering. Hope because something is within their grasp and their desire is beyond words; wonderment lest there be some unexpected hitch—a fearful feeling of disappointment when you get there. Well, here it was, suddenly stamped on this boy's face—tremendous hope, tremendous wistfulness. He simply replied:

"Oh, rather, but you see I just love tramping about the farm with the governor! Watching things grow and putting up sort of fights with the jolly old earth."

"You're bent on being a farmer, then?"

"I should jolly well say so! There's something about it that's so—so——." He struggled for the word. "So belonging to you—*made* by you!" He stared up at me triumphantly.

I asked abruptly, "And Farmer Swinsco—how is he?"

"Just splendid!" he cried. "Just splendid! You know he's been so ill—nearly crippled? And yet—why, you'd never think so, you simply could n't! He just goes about in that chair of his, seeing to every-

thing—and never minding what people say about that land.”

I broke in there. “What do they say?”

“Oh, you know.” His voice was full of scorn. “They funk at having anything to do with it after that flooding. They say it’s evil—got a bad name and not meant to be touched, and all that sort of rot! As well as abusing him for wasting money and all on it! Did you ever know anything so silly? Why, it’s simply glorious; it’s the best thing in the world to fight for a thing, don’t you think?”

“Evidently you think it is?”

“Why, of course I do! It makes it worth while.”

I asked sharply, “Makes what worth while?”

He answered slowly: “Oh, I don’t quite know. Everything, I suppose. But I don’t see the use of things being too easy; there’s no fun in it.”

He was so certain, so ready! Yet to me there is always something almost terrible in the way words of your youth come back in after years to mock and cut you—rattle about like so many hailstones until they make you bleed and bleed again.

I asked then, “And young Ayerst, how do you like him?”

He looked somewhat uneasily; the dreamy look seemed to leave his face. He said, “Oh, all right, you know.”

I did not know, and I said so somewhat sharply. “What do you mean by ‘all right’? ‘All wrong,’ I suppose, is the real answer!”

He looked up at me mischievously.

"I think I'll leave old Ayerst to you!" He went on rather reflectively: "It's difficult to explain, you know. We don't see things in the same sort of way; he's got such funny sorts of ways and ideas—so, so utterly different from the governor; much more like—Miss Swinsco!"

"And you don't care much about either of them?"

He jerked his shoulders rather impatiently. "It's not so much how I feel: they're not so over-friendly to me, you see!"

I had just started to demand somewhat irritably what on earth he meant, when there came the sound of voices and steps from the yard. Andrew slipped off the table where he had been lounging with the cry:

"That's the governor!" And I saw his whole face light up with curious eagerness and affection. He turned then suddenly to me and whispered excitedly: "I say, whatever you do don't offer him any help; it's what Swinny *will* do and it just drives him crazy!" And he darted away from me toward the door, crying:

"Hullo, sir! I say, you do simply spin along! Is n't it tremendous Mr. Penrose's back again?"

I heard the old man's great voice: "Don't bawl at me, young fellow. I'm not deaf yet, ye know!" Then a sudden heaving bump and he wheeled into the room. After all, he had n't changed so very much in those years. They might have bruised him and snarled at

him with uncommon brute force, but they could n't damage him so very much. Just a few white hairs in that great beard and a slight show of wrinkles about the tight skin; possibly, too, a certain strained look around the grim mouth. But that was all. He sat as straight and taut in that chair as he had stood on that snow-covered road and pledged his word for Andrew so many, many years past. He wore a sleeveless vest, and the great muscles could be plainly seen heaving and stretching beneath it; about the lower part of his body there was arranged a thin covering.

I put my hand out to him, and he caught it firmly.

"Well, Mr. Penrose! Glad to see ye, glad to see ye." And went on, with his usual impatience, "And what d'ye think o' my lad?"

It was on my lips to retort, "Magnificent—utterly magnificent!" But I checked myself in time, because you see I realized he did not mean Andrew—because at that instant I was startled by the appearance of Ayerst.

He had just slithered into the room, and I know it struck me as quite remarkable that so big a man could move so smoothly. When I say big, I am not talking of such strength and bigness as the Skipper's or old Swinsco's: he had a sort of gawky, heavy appearance, just as if the Maker of all things had flung flesh and skin at him, and left him to do the fitting himself! And it was pretty obvious there had been no nicety in that latter. He seemed to stick out at all manner and kind of places—rather gaunt about the knuckles, a

bit bumpy at the shoulders, a trifle over-sharp around the hips. He stood too long on his legs and too short with his arms. A very pale face with paler hair and equally pale eyes. They were the oddest part of him, those eyes, though I am bound to admit his mouth ran them pretty close! The former seemingly but half opened and having a perpetual dodging, flickering way with them, the other crooked and thin—twitching and twisting as if bent most furiously on keeping in time with those agitated lids. . . . Mark you, I am the first to admit that the outside appearance goes for nothing—there is plenty of fine stuff beneath all manner of grotesqueness; but there was something odd about Ayerst—odd, you see, but not quaint! Comic, if you like, but not whimsical! He did n't tickle the happy side of you, but he jarred rather upon your suspicions. He set you wondering just how much was wrapped up beneath all that oddity, and just what it was and how far it could go. He savored of the dandy, too—not that his clothes were cut by any better hands than a country tailor's, but they were quite startling in a place like Ditchling! Maroon-colored jacket and quite correct breeches, highly polished boots and gaiters, with fancy waistcoat and spotted cravat.

This was Ayerst, then—the hope of the house, the answer to prayer, the outcome of belief!

I had a sort of feeling of pins and needles all over me, that crept into my brain and made speech difficult.

Ayerst Swinsco. . . . Well, why not? What had it to do with me what kind of a chap he was? Who,



anyhow, was I to have either doubts or disappointments or perplexities over matters that were none of mine? And worse still, of what kind could I be to be thinking all the while of such distasteful things as comparisons?

I said with as much cordiality as I was able to summon: "I've got to make his acquaintance properly yet! How are you, Ayerst? Why I left you quite a bit of a chap: you've grown up properly!"

His pale eyes flickered, opened very wide, as if to take me completely in, and then shut almost entirely as if what he saw of my shabby clothes and rough appearance caused him discomfort beyond words. He said, and his voice was of the pale and smooth kind:

"It's a goodish time since you were here?"

I nodded and the old man struck in: "He's left his learning now, he has! Picking up my job now; makin' his way."

I asked, "Glad to leave school?"

He murmured, "It were a grind."

There came a sudden outburst from old Swinsco. "*Was* a grind, young man, *was*! Them lesson-books o' yourn ha' taught *me* more than you, I reckon!" A kind of brooding expression for one instant shadowed his face; he turned to me with some bitterness: "They don't know what's good; it's them that missed it can tell!"

I said, with some attempt to cheer him, "I can promise you it is n't always schooling that makes a man."

He grunted with stubborn disbelief: "'T is n't for any gentleman not to know his letters."

From young Swinsco there came a sudden veiling of those pale eyes, and a sort of spasm around his mouth which seemed to make it even more twisted. He said very gently, as if his tongue was so bored it could not move with any decency, "I never quite see why a farmer should know so much of books."

I thought old Swinsco was going to burst out again, but to my intense surprise it was Andrew who interrupted:

"That 's because you jolly well don't think! Burns was a plowman and Bunyan a tinker—think what they found out of lesson-books!"

The pale tired lids opened with astonishing wideness and then closed exceedingly abruptly and completely. He murmured, "I thought they both spent a great deal of their time in prison."

Andrew hit with his heels against the table where he was sitting. "Oh, *that!*" he retorted scornfully. "That simply did n't matter! And, anyway, not old Burns!"

I demanded, "And pray, what do you know of either of them?"

He grinned back at me with boyish delight at my obvious surprise, "From Mr. Baldwin" (this, the old rector, by the way). "They were his great men—the two B's he would call them! You could get the best of lessons from their lives as you would from any!"

"And what did they teach *you*, eh?" This from the old man, with terrific tugs at that huge beard.

Andrew stopped the steady tattoo he was keeping up on the table legs; he answered rather shyly: "Why," he said, "you learnt of poetry and love from the one, and God and battles from the other."

I saw the big hands grip violently at the chair arms so that the veins shot up on them like streaks of knotted rope. He repeated heavily: "Love? Love d' ye say? What's that fur you?"

The brown legs started off again. "Oh, well," he answered carelessly, "there is always something to learn, I suppose."

The big hands loosened with a sudden jerk their violent hold on the chair. He answered grimly: "Then you can go an' learn this minute how to ring pigs! Get you gone to Beaton in the lower yard; Mr. Penrose an' I ha' much to talk on."



## CHAPTER IV.

### I

**A**LL said and done, memory is a painful thing, and I positively dislike you for making me drag out this yarn. Believe me, it is detestable because of the yearning it tears out of you—because of the sharp jabs it will inflict on your heart. Even its spelling is false; it should be written tragedy—it *is* tragedy! It should be named “pain”—it means pain!

I may be old now, feeble enough, if you will, but there is no groping yet in my mind to resurrect those scenes long dead—long past. To catch hold of Time by his skirts and look backward over his shoulders at all those things memory spells, at all those tunes memory still pipes. . . . Look back at them!

Hot days with Andrew on the sea. Hot scorching days with the sun blistering the painted boat, and beating out all manner and kind of scents from that perfectly still ocean.

Utterly silent, utterly dead. . . . Somehow you could not picture it peopled, you could not picture it raging. It stretched blue and flattened like glass to the horizon where the sweltering haze received it and wrapped it round about with mysterious strands of

mist. Andrew, all naked and dripping, swinging idly from the bows; very white where his skin had been covered; very brown where the sun had ruthlessly caught it. Andrew, full of all manner and kind of ideas, thrusting forward with sudden questions and hopes. Andrew, part dreamer, part impatient youth.

When the mood had him he would ply me with questions of travel—outlandish spots principally. I remember he had no taste for cities. Then at other times, as the mood had passed, he was scheming, loving the flat lands of Lincolnshire.

"I don't know what I want," he told me one day. "Don't know how I want to satisfy myself. Sometimes all this seems so small," and he made a tremendous impatient sweep of his arm. "So small, and I want bigger things; jolly old spaces, and all that tremendous feeling of what lies beyond! Then—then I feel, because I came here, some one, some God, some Unknown, had some jest with me, some idea when it tossed me ashore. Must have done! Else why *here*? And, O Lord! I love it! . . . But it does n't love me! I can feel that—it's got a grudge against me and there must be some meaning in it all; there's always same meaning behind everything; and then—I watch and I wait. And you know, Penrose, sometimes the blessed place seems alive, all ready and watching and waiting! And then I wonder what meaning it's got hidden away, and when it'll spring out all alive!"

I remember asking curiously, "But you won't be staying here all your life?"

And he twisted his foot about in the water so that the spray flicked over me. "As to that," he retorted carelessly, "how do I know? I've got to make my way. I've got to wait awhile and see how I stand, or if I stand at all!"

I hit very hard with my pipe on the boat's edge. "When the old man dies——" I began hesitatingly.

"When the old man dies," he answered impatiently. "There's Ayerst. What do you suppose Ayerst will have to say to me?"

I said, "You'll be your own master then."

He shot a quick glance at me, and then turned away again.

"So will Ayerst. That will be my beginning or my end! I came by the sea; shall I go by it? I wonder."

Then, with sudden fretfulness, he'd jerk back into the seat and pull on the oars.

## 2

Get back with Time—long way back. And through it all the years jogging at Andrew, pulling him on, adding to him this way, strengthening him that. Eighteen, nineteen, twenty—always with much to say, always urging him on, whimpering at his heels and making much speed with him.

He would come into my cottage (did I tell you I was owner of an infinitesimal spot in Ditchling "Old"?) in the late winter evenings and roast chestnuts and potatoes at my fire. Crouch there in silence watching the smoke from his pipe join the gray strands of the

fire and sweep heavenward with them up the chimney. Crouch there, and then let fly with one of his puzzlements. Once I remember he turned as he sat and peered up at me with wrinkled brows. "Who do you think my mother was, Penrose? My father—I wonder what kind of a link there must have passed from them to me."

"Some children," I told him, "have practically nothing of their parents in them."

He broke a chestnut savagely between his fingers.

"Ah, but I would like to feel the touch there! Like to know some bit of their feelings, desires, had crept into me. I say, Penrose, was ever a man like me? What sort of folk were they? O Lord, Penrose, what would I not give to have a glimpse of those two unknown?"

I answered him angrily: "So you say, so you say! But what if that missing link had been your salvation?"

He flung back at me with fine scorn: "What a gospel to believe! Practical enough for those who like it, but I would let my fancy roam and take me along with her. God knows it's poor enough stuff—only paint-work. That's where the rub comes in."

I asked with my usual bluntness: "What does Ayerst think of such things?"

He gave a sort of grunt that might have meant anything. "Ayerst! Do you think he cares? Can you think of Ayerst with a soft feeling about his heart? I can't! Yet I did ask him once when I was a much littler chap. And I often wonder why I was such a

fool! That is the oddest thing of life—of things—letting out some bit of you that you know to be entirely your own! And yet you suddenly say it to the wrong person. Why?”

He stared at me with brooding eyes. “Why?”

I shook my head. He went on:

“Oh, well, it does n’t matter, but it’s a freakish sort of business. We’d been lambing, I remember—both of us still at school but holidays—up on the wold. It was one of those cold, clean afternoons when the sun is but a bit of a lamp in the sky, and a thin lazy kind of wind just moved the dank grass. Why, in God’s name, did I even get on such a subject with Ayerst? It must have been that odd, silent sort of feeling in the air; it must have been that sullen, heaving sea! A mocking, jeering kind of sea, with a sneer about each wave, and a laugh about its roarings. Sometimes the sea gets me like that. Sometimes it chuckles and mutters away at me.” He let his chin sink to his folded arms. “*See what I’ve got! See what I’ve got! Part of you, part of you. . . .*” He stared silently into the fire, arousing himself with a jerk to continue roughly: “Anyway, sea or air or what—I suddenly found myself asking Ayerst, ‘Do you ever think of your parents?’ I could have bitten my tongue out as I spoke, for the sort of amused flicker that crossed his face was answer enough. He murmured in his gentle, apologetic manner, ‘Dear old fellow, why ever should I?’

“I went on, because something in me could not bear



to be silenced. 'Are nt' you ever lonely? Don't you ever miss something? Good Lord, man, is n't it as though a chunk had been cut clean from your life?' And he just answered with his usual, softly humorous way, '*Put in*, you mean, dear old chap; given me a glimpse of life that I might never have had if I'd known my real name!'

"And I, fool that I was, still persisted—you know how I go on, Penrose? Fairly cried at him—'Life that you've *lost*, you mean! Years that you may have missed and can never pick up with again. Faces in your life that you'll never know?'" And he simply cocked his head on one side as if I were a sort of circus curiosity and hummed softly, 'Now I never knew that you could get so upset, old boy; fancy having all that inside of you! Too exciting for me, though; I reckon I'm better off as I am!' And I just stared at him—at the twist of his mouth and all its hidden meaning. I saw my folly. I knew my idiotic fall! I could only mutter, 'Oh, never mind, never mind!'"

He was standing up now, staring straight at me hot and flushed, and extraordinarily moved, I said:

"But look here, Andrew, why did that affect you so much?"

And he flung his hands above his head and then down to his sides as though he would fling something from him and could not.

"Why? O man, it's easy enough! Because I let him see there's something soft in me! Because I let

him know I could *feel*—and I would n't have let him think that for the world! It was my safeguard, that carelessness of mine; it was a sort of shield! Now he's seen another side, and he knows I can be hurt, so he'll jab at me hard—hard—hoping I'll hit back, hoping the old man will see, *will know!*" And then he cried in sudden fury: "Now you think I'm a coward!"

I answered him, "I think you're a precious poor friend to think such things of me."

All the energy died away. He dropped into a chair, picking up his pipe from the floor where it had fallen.

"Sorry, sorry, that's my distardly tongue! How it does lead me on! Yet, when you come to think of it, the way I stick on here is nothing short of cowardliness. Then you see—there's some sort of magic about this place, some sort of feel. It holds me, it keeps me—why? There's the old man: I should hurt him badly if I left. That's not conceit: I just feel it. There's a kind of bond between us. Besides I owe him much—more than I can ever pay. It's not for me to snap like a fretful child at any little pricking that may come my way. Such things are nothing to the life—the *chance* he's given me. I'm caught! And I'm a willing prisoner, for there is enchantment in these marshes. Funny, is n't it? that I should speak so when you think how much it's got from me! What possible good can it give out? Eh, Penrose, what good? And why do I fill myself with such imaginings?"

No, I don't think he had any superstitious idea about



the place. He was n't that kind. He did feel there was some link between him and it; possibly, though he never deliberately mentioned it, he connected it most vividly with the wreck and the drowning of his parents. You must understand any idea they had never been on that ship, that he was orphaned already or even that they were alive in some distant country, never entered into his head. Or if it ever had, he simply brushed it on one side. They had been there—he was utterly positive. And the very part of the sea that faced Ditchling had taken them. So, as I have already said, the connection between that flat, water-logged land and Andrew must have been a very real, very tremendous thing in his mind. As if they had touched it with their dead feet. Hallowed it and made it holy ground. He simply could not bring himself to turn his back on it then anyway. Afterward when he felt he had paid his debt,—this most honorable debt to old Swinsco,—well, there was time enough for such things. For the present, Ayerst and Miss Swinsco—like creatures of ill omen—might hedge him round with all manner of cunning little tricks. What of that? And who were they anyway? And what were such little businesses of life compared to this bigger, sterner matter between him and old Swinsco?

“Mark you,” he had once told me. “Mark you, there's nothing sentimental about it! I don't imagine the old man would break his heart if I cleared off. It is n't that; it's a matter of repayment, the scratching out of a debt, *thanking* him! That's what it is! Not just taking bread from his fingers with a mere nod of

the head! But showing some sort of gratitude, no matter how poor—giving him my hands and my energy to their uttermost.”

## 3

Get back with Time! Like a diary those pages are spread before me; like a rushing wind those years come sounding at my ears. Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three! All the seasons galloping ahead with Andrew, month after month touching him after their fashion, to race past him and come again after many days with the cry, “How is it with you, brother—how speed you?” All manner of things happening, all kinds of business spreading out before him. . . . It was remarkable, now I look back on it, how greatly Miss Swinsco was in evidence all those years. What an extraordinary sinister figure hers was, and how equally extraordinary was the influence she had on young Ayerst. Reviewing her again as I do, marking down every scrap of remembrance, there could have been no real affection between this odd couple, yet it was so entirely positive that just as within that mean hard bosom of hers she held a most tremendous grudge against Andrew, so did she hold prisoner some sort of liking for Ayerst. I never knew anything of her past life. Certainly I could never imagine her driven, ill treated, neglected. No, I am sure it was none of these that tightened to mere nothingness her narrow soul. It was a purely selfish motive of getting the best out of life, of using some one—no matter who—to

support her through her days; a kind of feather-bed whereon to droop her plumes.

She was the kind of woman who makes a bargain wherever she is or wherever she may go. I could fancy Miss Swinsco at the gates of heaven putting it with all her cunning to Peter himself. "You just let me in," she would have said, "and I'll tell you who you ought to keep out."

That's what she did with Ayerst. The subtlety of the one was hardly noticed by the other; there was a perfectly mutual understanding, and in their case the person they wanted to keep out was Andrew. When I come to think it out in a perfectly cold manner I realize how positively staggering her practicality was. It seemed inconceivable that Andrew would ever be more than a friend and a worker to the old man. The whole of old Swinsco's possessions would pass to Ayerst; he bore the name; he was, to all intents and purposes, the son. What had Andrew to do with the affair? Yet, mark you, that was not enough for Miss Swinsco; by Jove, no! There was such a thing as chance, and chance might prove an able mistress to Andrew, while Andrew—and herein spoke her shrewd mind.

Suppose Andrew in possession of the farm; result, her complete muzzling! The entire maiming of her authority and more particularly the abrupt vanishing of her feather-bed! So she set about driving small wedges about him, sharp, nagging little wedges that pricked his most sensitive side, and cut him like little

whips. They never moved him, never broke his pride. Yet, if their aggravation reached its uttermost at times, think how they must have rejoiced twofold to find, as Ayerst found, that nervous dreamy side of his nature! Rejoiced. . . . And gone on steadily driving at those wedges. . . .

And it was in the middle of all this, in the midst of all these hurrying years, that a remarkable change commenced about Miss Swinsco—a change that was all the more extraordinary when you knew her as I did—when you realize as deeply as I how entirely self-satisfied were her ideas, and how methodically she worshiped the little tin god Self. I tell you it came with almost a shock to think of her with any religious thought in her life! Incredible to imagine her, in fact, with any other interest beyond the careful arranging of the feathers which were to make her nest. Yet she actually had this interest? She actually bent her head in penitence! But you will see as time progresses how perfectly she arranged to join that line which divides the body from the soul and the material from God. For the moment that does not matter. I am talking of the beginning of the business. . . . It was Andrew who so carelessly alluded to it, and thereby fanned the bitterness she had for him into something approaching a blaze. . . . I had been down there to supper on a Sunday night—when there was some slight talk, led by Ayerst and Miss Swinsco, of the dinner they had had with friends in Boston—the Yardleys. As usual the old man sat silent, then grunted out :

"And never went to church either of ye, I'll be bound!"

Ayerst told him gently, "Not so very much time, Father."

"Ye started early enough; did ye stay to gad on the road?"

And Miss Swinsco's rasping voice: "I'll thank you not to talk of gadding with me, brother. If it's friends you grudge me, better say so than wrap your words in insults!"

And the Andrew, who hated these wrangles which would so suddenly break out—Andrew, to whom all religions were one and the same provided they worshiped the real God in them, cried in his cheerful manner:

"I say, why hide your good works beneath a bushel, eh? Why, I saw you devout as any saint coming from the Catholic church on the Boston highroad!"

It was extraordinary the violent change in her. Her whole face flushed to a kind of purple red and her eyes narrowed to shiny black currants. But she got no chance to say her say then, for, with a kind of roar, the old man was at her demanding:

"What's this, what's this? Are you doing tricks wi' th' Romans, eh?"

She never answered him; she muttered at Andrew, her voice all thick and furious: "What's it to you? What were you doing, prying round my heels?"

And Andrew, flushed and exceedingly uncomfortable, answered hotly: "Now, that's a rotten kind of thing to say! I was walking round there, Penrose



and I. We came up Church Lane as you came out. As a matter of fact it was the scarlet of the trap with Ayerst in it that first caught my eye. I'm not the kind of person to——"

He was not allowed to say any more. Old Swinsco crashed his fist on the table so that the plates and glasses fairly leaped into the air.

"Now, mark ye, I 'll ha' no Romans under my roof! I've had no good from 'em and I 'll keep my house clean from their sort. Understand that—understand it well, too, by God!"

And then the smooth, deprecating voice of Ayerst came gently through this decidedly heated atmosphere.

"As a matter of fact, if you'd just let me speak—as a matter of fact, it was nothing to do with a service; it was just to see that window they put up for Councilor James, after all only a sort of local curiosity, dear Father."

The old chap was looking at him with a sort of undecided, rough perplexity, as I remember once seeing a wolf look at its cub. He asked heavily: "And did ye go in, young fellow? Mind, I 'll ha' no lies."

The pale hairless lids almost entirely hid the equally pale eyes. "Why, no, dear Father!" he murmured. "You know what an utter sort of heathen I am."

I noticed a sort of spasm passed over that fine strong face. He muttered into his beard: "A Catholic and a heathen! Pretty sort of family!" and sent the wheeled chair back with a jerk from the table.

It was n't over then by any manner of means.



Afterward, in the garden, as Andrew was seeing me off, Miss Swinsco came violently on us. She simply did n't notice me, but spat out at the boy like a wild-cat.

"A word with you—a word with you, if you please! What were you doing after me this morning? What were you at?"

Andrew answered rather hesitatingly: "Doing? What was I doing? Why, I've told you! Penrose and I were having a most tremendous tramp round about. Good Lord——!" And he gave a sort of apologetic laugh. "Good Lord, why, by the way you speak, you might be thinking I was on the watch for you!"

She answered with extraordinary passion: "That's just what I *do* think, just what I *know*. I'm no fool; I know many things, young man, many things!"

"Then I wish you'd say them," Andrew told her warmly. "I wish you'd speak out and have done with it!"

I have never seen a woman so mad as she was! She had her distorted face rammed right up against him, her great breasts seeming to swell until I almost expected the tight stuff of her bodice to split clean away. She hardly heard what Andrew said. She seemed to speak with difficulty, as if her rage strangled her; she went on:

"Trying to trap me down even at my prayers! Laying in wait for me like a spy, a common spy!"

Even in the darkness I saw Andrew turn a sudden

livid white; I noticed his hands blurred and patchy caught at each other with a most violent gesture. "Look here," he muttered thickly. "Look here. . . ." And there was something about his voice that made me catch at his two hands and cry to Miss Swinsco:

"See here, I think you've said enough, and what more there is to say tell it to me, and keep a check on your tongue!"

And she was round and spitting out at me—"I'll have no words with a godless man like you! No words and no interference. My church-going, wherever it may be, is a deal sight better than the poison you and your kind sow! Take it from me, Mr. Penrose, as the Lord will have me do, so I obey; those who don't like it can best keep quiet; I don't answer to *them*! But if need be they shall answer to me. That's my say; best to know it, the two of you; best to *heed it*!" And she had twisted her round body about and was clamping away up the drive.

Andrew and I, left to ourselves, stood staring stupidly at each other. Andrew said in a blank, almost toneless voice:

"I say, I say, Penrose——" I hardly heeded him; I was hot and furious all over. I cried savagely:

"Good God, what a woman—what a *creature*——"

Andrew muttered very softly, "I say Penrose, how she does hate me!" He startled me, and I answered him roughly.

"Don't be such an idiot, boy; she's off her head!"

He simply went on: "With hate, yes! She simply loathes me, Penrose. I wonder why."

## 4

Yet this month that jolted at him so badly was followed by one of the most tremendous elation on Andrew's part. I can see him now, extraordinarily hot and extraordinarily excited. Bareheaded as usual, despite the blazing sun, with his blue shirt all open at the throat, and the sleeves right up to his shoulders; flinging himself from a huge brown horse to rush into my cottage with a shout:

"Penrose, I say, Penrose, where the dickens are you? O Lord, man, what do you think? The governor's bought that new land—Tilling Plain as they call it—you know, they've just done draining it; well, he's got twenty-five acres of it and he's put me in charge to make it all fit and proper! Is n't that splendid? Is n't it fine? A job on my own. A sort of adventure, Penrose. A slight enough thing, I jolly well know! But it is *something*—a big something to me! I feel . . . Oh, I feel like that old chap Isaac, when he went his way and pitched his tents on his own land! That's what I'm doing! Pitching my tents, getting *my own* out of the earth!"

He stopped with a sudden jerk, and began to fill his pipe with fingers that shook the slightest.

"I suppose even you must think me a precious sort of a fool the way I go on." There was a kind of apologetic note about his voice. "I suppose I am.

Yet even you can't know just what a trust like this seems to me! For it is a *trust*—that's why I feel it so. It's a sign—a sign of faith from the old man—faith in my work, faith in the poor stuff that I am. It's the grandest thing that could have happened to me; it's the best thing I could have asked for. . . . Not that it'll ever be mine—my very own!" He jerked red ashes from the pipe and stamped them beneath his foot. "Not that! But it'll be something I shall have left my mark on, when the time comes for me to move. Something I shall have touched! Earth I can look back on as having turned to my own purpose. Like those old fellows in the Bible—to whom earth and space and stars were one with the mystery of God—who pitched their tents and made their mark, and went their way. . . . Even as I shall—please Heaven!"

. . . He was sowing his seed, stepping afoot with Time. Twenty-five acres of marsh land, of doubtful soil. He was to be answerable for them; he was to make good with them if any good were possible. To render such account of this his stewardship—to toil, to bend to sweat. . . . Half-way to paying that debt of his—a good half-way! "It's a sort of chance," as he once said. "A chance, and it may never come my way again! It's now—*now* that I can show my gratitude, now that I can prove all I have felt, all I have so longed to say!"

Always a man of the fields, always one with the earth and the things that belonged to it; so now even

a thousand times more. Winter and summer, daylight and drowsy mornings . . . to turn and plow and sow and plow and turn and sow again. To wait and watch and hope. To rejoice—and give no heed to disappointment.

In those days he was noticed more by the village. Until then, you must understand, most of his work had been up on the wold; now he was seen more, observed more, a certain interest was meted out to him. There was Cathy Yardley, pretty foolish Cathy, with her rather defiant coquettish ways, and a tremendous belief in her own fascination. I remember her hair, puffed about her dainty pointed little face in very fair curls; I remember she wore white if she possibly could, and she liked ribbons and flowers, Cathy Yardley—such a flimsy little nature! She was the only child of old Barnabas Yardley—a man with a face like a camel and an air that was as ponderous and overweighted as that beast itself. His was a somewhat important position in Ditchling: corn chandler and timber merchant, and agent to some big coal dealer in Lincoln. Unlike the village folk, you never saw him in working clothes; I imagine his idea was to impress his clients by the spruceness of his garments, by the immensity of his watch-chain and the cleanliness of his cravat. “I do not work,” seemed to be his aspect; “I control.” He had certain authority in the local affairs at Boston, and relations there into the bargain, who prinked themselves on their remarkable superiority, and perfect correctness of their tea-parties. You would always



find Cathy at these parties. There would be much talk and brightness, much chaffing and high laughter. Very pleasurable all these things to Cathy.

And it is paramount to this story to make it known that you would have seen a good deal of Ayerst besides. And I happen to know there was at one time just sufficient talk of the two of them to cause a most violent scene between him and the old man. A scene that led to a sudden upheaval and rearrangement of matters at the farm; a turning and twisting of affairs, of which two things were of considerable importance—one the departure of Ayerst to London, to stay with a brother of the Lincoln firm of lawyers with whom Swinsco did considerable business, and who therefore held him in considerable respect; the other I have already mentioned—this intrusting of Andrew with the new land at Tilling Plain.

And it was while working there that Cathy, possibly for the first time, took any real notice of him. She had seen him before, at her father's yard in Lincoln, when the fair came round, and maybe passed him occasionally on the road. But in those days, though she may have bowed prettily in answer to his careless salutation, she had other thoughts and ideas to fill her mind. She may have had them now; and when I come to think of it, I do not think they ever utterly died in her. But for the moment she was sulky, out of patience, vexed at innumerable things. Ayerst was n't there to drive her continually to the Boston relations, and possibly her father began to think there



was a little too much dancing and singing at that house. She did n't go over so frequently and the days hung remarkably heavy on her hands.

Ditchling, you see, had little or nothing to offer her by way of amusement. She became peevish and fretful, and yet, with that alert methodical manner that so many women have, she set about looking for some interest—amusement to help her along. She found it in Andrew.

In her way, Cathy was the complete egoist. Her satisfaction in herself and her apparent charm was the most positive thing in her life. There are some such women—and their certainty would be ridiculous if it were not so tragic. Thus with Andrew she was so completely assured. She could have had no qualms, no doubtful moments. His carelessness, his abstraction, even his quick abruptness when he would sometimes pass her by, worried her not in the least. She considered him shy—nervous, perhaps; she possibly spoke of him in this strain to her friends—he was all the things that pleasant shy men were. . . . He was none of them as I knew so well. He hardly noticed her; that was the point: and this Cathy simply never realized. She knew nothing—saw nothing beyond her own charms. Of this, she was very certain, very satisfied.

Has it ever struck you how persistent and methodical Time can be? Have you ever imagined how busy and exact the business of it all is? Such a fitting and arranging! Such a figuring and piecing out, a placing

and a planning; all leading—sometimes even in an uneven, crooked kind of way—to some kind of crisis—to one certain and inevitable question: “What will he do now. What will he say next?” Queer trickery about it all! Unseen, and very often amazing endings to the whole of this absurd little affair we call life, sent spinning out into this bit of a world by some unknown, un-understandable Finger and Thumb. . . . What laughter there must be in heaven. What tears! . . . Persistent and methodical! This piecing out, this fitting together. With each year some movement, some happenings! Certain things developing, certain events stretching farther afoot, yet with that same persistence joining up, slipping together, making a whole. Movement and life in the village, movement and life some few miles out. About that hamlet of a place Colt-Harrow, about that grim faded old house Coltons, about that grotesque, strutting little figure of a man ex-Lieutenant Carey, royal navy—lord of the manor! Light creeping in through his rusty old doors and windows, light and yet more light. For, just a year before Andrew took charge over Tilling land, there came over the seas one Tarnia, only child of the absurdly important Lieutenant—Tarnia. . . . So, to her father’s house.

## CHAPTER V

### I

**T**ARNIA.—And for reasons that you will know later, and I hope understand, it is befitting you should hear of her first from Andrew. As he once told me many years later . . . “She is like the wind on a summer’s night. . . .”

There was something in her face that took you back—fought most desperately with your thoughts and hurried you back through the ages twisting and groping in your mind for the likeness that you saw mirrored within hers. She had the mystery that is Egypt; the solitary passion that is the desert. . . . The desert! That was just it; the stillness, and yet the movement; its untamed passion and yet withal its marvellous yearning. . . . And all the time it was as if Egypt itself had touched her with magic fingers and veiled her face and made her secret; had whispered so to her:

“You shall be as all women through the ages—you shall be as none! For what woman is like another? I have set my seal on your face, I have set my shadow about your eyes. To break that seal, to raise that

shadow—it is for you and one other!” . . . For the rest she was a very still woman.

Tarnia.—Well, she came to the Fen land, and all the time she dwelt there she was entirely foreign to it. Like Andrew she came by the sea: unlike him it had been a nurse to her, a very great love, no casting away, only a great and terrible yearning. I want to tell you the meaning of that; I want you to know some of the history that was hers before she came over the sea.

I have mentioned to you the little cocksure, trumpeting man who was her father. He was an ex-lieutenant of his Majesty's navy; and once some Nelson man had nursed him into a prime sailor. Yet when I knew him he was all pepper and salt, all foolish importance, and bumptious pride. He lived at Coltons—Colt-Harrow in the county of Lincoln. He had a great dingy old house, with a great dingy old garden, with iron gates, with dusty rooms and moth-eaten furniture. It could only have been the compassion of God on high that he did not know how the whole place mocked him. Mocked him for what he had been and what he had sunk to.

A country gentleman, a great name! And you may ask is a man down because of such splendid things? You never knew him, my friend, and I never knew him when his spirit was reared above and above again such earth-bound dignity; of such affairs he knew nothing and cared less when he walked his ship—a royal ship—when he wore a uniform and wore it royally,

when he used his sword and used it like a king's man. . . . Those days!

*That* was his time; that was when he was uplifted above himself and *lived* his life!

Knowing him as I did, seeing him,—fussy, fretful, domineering,—it was impossible almost ever to have thought him as that; and yet, if that caused certain doubt, I tell you it was almost staggering to realize how once he had grasped so earnestly at romance! Yet he had, and that was how Tarnia was born.

Let us go back a bit and think of him in those dead days, a mere distant relative of these Careys, of Colt-Harrow. Very distant, I rather imagine. His father, then, was a parson in some obscure village in Kent, and he was one of many children—somewhere between the eldest and the youngest, I rather imagine. The important fact was that the patron of his underfed father was either a post-captain or an admiral—I've forgotten which, just as I don't remember his name—it's of no consequence—the point is, he extended his patronage to young Carey, and pretty soon he had triumphant property in a monstrous sea-chest and an absurd dirk, and off he goes upon his first adventure! You must n't think of him then as the pompous little chap I've been telling you about; you must know him for what he certainly was then—or what he grew into as time went on. A slippery, keen-eyed fellow, alert, quick, overflowing with enterprise; that was the Arnold Carey then! There was plenty to do to keep him



going in those hot days, and you may be certain the tougher the matter he 'd be the first in it and the last out! Expeditions on the Peninsula coast, blockade work, stiff fighting in America over those damn fool colonies; plenty of it—more than enough! and the zeal of him then must have been tremendous! And then to finish up with that sharp business at Navarino with Codrington. It brought him certain distinction; it brought him something more—an injury to his leg which would make him limp to his grave, and a blessing from the admiralty in the shape of his discharge. It must have been a pretty bad thing for him; it must have knocked him uncommonly hard. And yet—what does he do? What does he care? Squares his jaw and sets his teeth. And very calmly marries! It is natural you will call it folly fast enough if I let you maybe talk! But I 'm not going to! It 's really not your concern nor mine. In those days he was—well, a man whom you and I have seen never. It 's just his record we are following up, and there was everything good about it, everything that stood for romance and pluck and chivalry. He married. And the woman? I 'm coming to that. It was n't a marvelous affair. How could a penniless lieutenant be expected to have good sense? And a man in love! Well, he 'd met her before, and treasured her up in that heart of his, and swore to have her one day! It had been in Italy. The squadron was at Naples. He then, on a few days' leave, went off with some others on a bit of a tour inland, right among the mountains



—and as romantic as any Garden of Eden. Well, they met there in those hills. She was n't of high birth, and she was n't of low. She came of Gipsy stock—she *was* a Gipsy all but her mother, who was of royal blood, so I have heard say! I know nothing about that; it was the daughter he met living with her father's people in tents, tending goats about the hills. There was no questioning on either side—they just knew and understood!

Afterward, then, he sought her out and they were married at the English church. You have to think of them in some dingy room; you have to see him looking at all manner of ships in the harbor, you have to be with them as they ate their frugal meals and discussed in whispers the marvelous happiness that was theirs. . . . But he was n't the kind that goes under. Not he! He kept that brain of his working; he kept those eyes of his well ahead. Was it the prettiness of his wife? Was it because he was English, and English navy people ranked high those days? It might have been that, it might have been chance—but a stray acquaintance in that harbor turned into a friendly merchant, a Jew, I believe, and like most of his kind, one with a cute business eye—and, well, luck had n't left him for so long, and he and this Gipsy wife are away on a ship of sorts, and he a trader among those queer and almost unknown islands down the Pacific way. Adventure? It was the stuff they were made of! Well, he worked in his fine tough way for that Jew fellow over in Naples. He traded, and he

cruised; he dealt wisely, and you may be sure he dealt unwisely. That's as may be. In hardly three years he was a free man. He was his own owner. Quit of the Jew, quit of all outside authority. He bought his own brig, he trod his own decks, he traded as he pleased and where he pleased; had servants and paid them. All his shackles had gone. And then it was, just as he had got clean away on his own, that their child was born—Tarnia. . . . Immense silences—immense space—immense mystery! This man—as we knew him to be then; and that woman who had traveled from her lemon-trees to this wonderful adventuring with her lover. So to them—Tarnia. . . .

Picture her out there, picture her as she was in those young, young days! Think of the heat and the blueness of the sky; get at the taste of that hot sea, and the mutter of wind fluttering heavy sails. . . . Sluggish voyages down sluggish rivers with gigantic trees bending to meet overhead, wild flights of colored birds, discordant music from some native village; and always the sea! Always the ship that would take her over empty and terrific space, always the stars for her to watch with the deck still warm beneath her naked feet. . . . All about her great invisible forces: mysteriously working about their business.

And after all, the years were but playing with her. Her mother died. . . . What was she like, this mother? Impossible to tell! Her record is a secret one. Yet I like to think of her as a creature of fire and flame, a woman of night and morning. . . . And

even as the heart that with one great swoop like the swoop of an eagle caught at the passion of her life, even so must she have bent her beautiful face bathed in tears, mother-wise, wonder-wise, over this marvellous joy—her daughter. Passing the love of women. . . . Is there such a thing? And then she died.

## 2

Quite suddenly and she had gone. And immediately there settled about her child, there wrapped around Tarnia, that most awful agony, the pall of loneliness. You will say she had her father; you will reason there was still this jolly keen father of hers: this splendid lover whose love had been the most perfect thing in her mother's life: this fine, eager sailor!

Well, even I am prepared to swear that when his whole being took on that remarkable change, the great love of his moved not one jot! The wrench in his heart remained forever a gaping, bleeding thing. And yet—it was exactly because of the depth of his wound he never saw hers! It was precisely because his grief had smote him hip and thigh, and crushed, as I believe, then and there every bit of that free adventuring spirit from him, he never realized, never imagined, the fearful anguish that was hers! Blind, thrice blind! And by his own rushing, stricken tears. . . .

This was beginning of the barrier between them, and I think it shot up completely with certain news from England.

All these years of adventuring had been marked by adventure of another kind at home. His father was dead, his mother, a sister here and a brother there—he was the elder surviving son, and therefore of some interest to certain rather moldy lawyers somewhere down in the City. . . . Coltons was empty. Colt-Harrow suddenly found itself without an overlord, and the whole place lay in moody silence waiting for some Carey to enter the stronghold. The ways and manner of it all does n't matter; the simple fact remains that Arnold Carey, in an abrupt and utterly unexpected circumstance, became heir to that whole property.

Coltons, destitute, masterless, waited patiently enough while search was made for this very distant relative, ex-Lieutenant Carey, late of his Majesty's navy. They followed him down, they chased him around. From the Admiralty to some hospital at Portsmouth, so on to some obscure place in Naples; from the old Jew, his first friend, now living in senile luxury, to a port in Java, and so to his brig some few weeks after his wife's death. Months it had taken to reach him, and now, while some musty old parchment writer took snuff in Lincoln's Inn, Arnold Carey, with crape on his arm, read this news beneath the awning of his ship on the Pacific. Can you see this little man as I see him? Can you think of him, spruce and hard and tight, on his spruce, hard, and tight ship, taking it all in? Can you realize what he had been? In the navy—in Nelson's navy, a trader, an adventurer, a lover? In those mountains, on these seas, with *her*

at his side, with her in his arms—with *her* on her death-bed, and then most bitterly nursing that stricken heart of his? ‘Can you, I ask? Can you! And *then* look again, and see for yourself the little tiny grain of egoism that must have been there also, that must have lain sleeping for all those years, and suddenly awoke and rubbed its eyes to mutter: “I have a name, an estate—a *future!*” He must have stuck out his ridiculous chest then, he must have cleared his throat a hundred times; he must have smoked an extra large cheroot with extra large importance. Little man, little strutting man! Yet a Carey of Coltons, Colt-Harrow, Lincolnshire! Oh! I tell you, such a little man on a little ship in a little sea, full of little thoughts! Yet big enough to break—as a peevish child will break a mirror—that adventuring spirit! To tear into strips—as a hysterical woman will a handkerchief—the last remnant of romance he still had in his soul. He is Arnold Carey, Esquire, of Coltons, Colt-Harrow, Lincolnshire, and he has buried deep down young Carey—young, keen, reckless Carey—fathoms deep beneath the sea.

There is very little hesitation about him; he makes his plans, and works them out in a feverish, important kind of manner. And possibly the most important is that Tarnia shall go to some finishing school in Paris. Terrific and extraordinary determination! Yet to my mind it is even more extraordinary that all that part—the news he had to tell, the decision he had made—re-



main and always will remain a sealed book as between her and her father.

A sealed and entirely unknown document! And there is certain significance in that because it was the one thing even in her after life she would never mention, the one most fearful knowledge she would never admit; that some one new and strange had arisen before her, that a mysterious kind of death seemed to have sucked under that old and dearly loved father. . . .

He does n't notice—he does n't see! He carries all before him with certain air of triumphant importance. He squares his accounts, and sells his brig; he issues his last final command when he steers her silently into Manila and gives her over to her new owner. A quick matter, arranged with due nicety, and they are both homeward-bound on some passenger ship for England. It is finished then; it is all over. Time has had a triumphant reaping; with one sweep of his scythe he has taken one soul to meet his account—with another, romance is sent wailing overboard. . . .

She is at school in Paris; she is learning all the correct rudiments of scholastic knowledge—she is learning many things besides. A most select place this academy, this correct establishment for young ladies. She is being looked at, summed up, and duly placed by the odd fifty or so young ladies of whom this seminary is made up. She is being surrounded by sharp inquisitive eyes and poked and picked at by



skilful chattering tongues. She is learning—learning many things, and above all her many imperfections. Dry-and-dull geography, dry-and-dull history, dry-and-dull voices, while the fifty or so pairs of eyes slyly mock her, and the fifty or so odd tongues titter and twitter to each other. She is learning. . . .

Always to learn—that was what she was there for! . . . Little things, bitter things. That if you are quiet you are an amusement; if you are sensitive, it is wiser not to wince; if you have deep feelings, it is better to keep them secret. That there is such a thing as laughter; and it can cut into your very soul and sear you for life. . . . And it must have been then, entirely and completely, that she let the old Egypt take charge of her and seal her eyes and lock her heart.

It was not the finish of the affair, that school. Her father had further arrangements. Immediately she was to travel; immediately there stepped forward from some mysterious, ancestral burrow a penniless dowager, with a plentiful supply of the bluest blood and all the most up-to-date methods of gaining the best equipped and provisioned husband.

Womanhood, in fact, was ascending upon Tarnia. But she was approaching it in chains. The gates that had held her so tightly during her school-days were no sooner opened wide for her to pass out than others appeared and shut her in. She had simply gone one step further in the art of schooling. She had no sooner finished with one task than another was meted out to her. It was a stern enough business this. She

was a sort of bait, you see, to be trailed about and catch up the tastiest fish. Somehow she did n't trail well enough. I have seen scraps of letters written by her father at that time. Rebuking notes, with many allusions to "coldness of manner," "not taking sufficient heed of your chances," and much hurt expressed at her "lack of consideration toward my old age." In other words, a hint that she should, with correct dutifulness, get a proper support elsewhere!

Pleasant sort of letters for a woman so sensitive and proud! But you must understand that things were not progressing so wonderfully with this little piece of pomposity at Colt-Harrow! Things, in fact, were rather on the tight side: he was beginning to feel unpleasantly squeezed, unpleasantly empty about the pockets.

The point was, he had fairly stuffed his round head with all manner and kind of schemes, not a single idea connected with land or land cultivation, and he did not wildly spring at it. He ventured where his placid ancestors never would have blundered. . . . So far as that he ventured on such business that no level-headed man would have looked at, far less have touched. He had such castles in the air that he virtually flew off the the ground and floated upon the very clouds. . . . And it was precisely those castles which tripped his stride—or should I say flight?—and made him bruise himself with exceeding discomfort!

Again, how queer, and un-understandable, that this little navy man, who once handled men in a way that

gained him credit from the lords of the admiralty, who set his teeth at any tight corner and wiped it clean, mixed his feet most vilely as he walked, and brought his house crashing about his head! Of his pluck, his foresight, and all those other inestimable qualities in these days one saw nothing. He only proved the existence of that little grain of self-pride, its madder growing! Coltons had been good enough for the Carey he had succeeded—not particularly rolling in richness and possessions, but with enough and more. Horses in the stable, wine in the cellars, liveries for the many servants, land and plenty to be plowed and sown, and all that kind of thing. And yet, this absurdly impatient man, what does he do—but plan for more! What does he think—but gain—gain—and more gain! Selling, buying, to borrow here and spend there. Altering this, and completing that! Speculating, in fact, and then loses his head! That tight, alert, keen little brain—it goes! There is always a reckoning in such affairs; it came soon enough. A horse or so less, a servant or two gone, a farm or so sold, some acres gone to waste. Reckoning! Most damnable word! For it means the recall of Tarnia. More than that: the very borrowing of her traveling expenses!

## 3

Thus her return. The most silent, most tragic thing that could have been. No trumpeting about this; no bonfires or banners, no speech-making and other such blaze of welcome, nothing better than the carrier's cart

from Lincoln to set her down at the gates of Coltons! So much for the ex-lieutenant; so much for the Careys of all Careys; so much for the vastness of the house with father and daughter cramped in one room, and somewhere among the cobwebs two old melancholy creatures to minister to them; so much for the acres of gardens with weeds and fungus for them to walk in! So much—ah, how much?

For all those hot, adventuring days, and the hot adventuring love that went with them! How many leagues from this barren house? How many fathoms beneath the sea? . . .

It was about a year, or perhaps a little more, before Andrew's venture with the Tilling land, and the abrupt despatch of Ayerst to London, that Tarnia came to Colt-Harrow. Yet in that time I do not think he met her but twice—once as they passed in the road and once at Coltons. It was the latter time only they spoke.

She had a fancy for roaming the country for miles around on the only horse they had in their poor stable. A great gray beast, thick of coat and heavy of hoof, with a certain furious baffled gleam about his eyes as though he had been bought for better things, and had come through bitter ways to a most bitter existence. But his neck took a prouder curve when she started to ride him, and in the end I think she lessened his drudgery and used him as befitted his magnificence. And it was during her riding these two first met—Andrew and Tarnia: met, and passed by. A dreary cold day, with a sodden droning wind and a sodden drab

sky. Yet her horse was hot and steaming, and she all warmly flushed from hard riding.

It was a fancy of hers to wear an odd, rather old-fashioned riding dress—not so much old-fashioned, but as having a fashion of its own, as belonging to her entirely, just as entirely as she belonged to it. A sort of plum color, with the coat cut very loose and heavy, with great paste buttons on the front and great soft gantlets reaching to her elbow. She would twist a colored scarf about her throat, orange or scarlet or blue as the whim seized her, while her hat was three-cornered and matched the dress, excepting the long bending feather, which was a vivid scarlet.

That was the first time he saw her, then: a strange, almost barbaric figure, set up on this great horse with that intense bleak sky behind her. Her head bent the slightest, so that the green of her scarf played tricks with her eyes. That stoop of her head was a very small thing, yet just sufficient for her to notice Andrew. The ruddy brown of him, and the deep fire-blue of that gleam between his lids, the impatient set of his head and breadth of his shoulders. . . . He swung past her then light-footed, bold in movement. Neither did either of them turn, and yet, as it happened, neither of them forgot that passing.

Not until some months later did he speak to her. That was at Coltons. Obviously there was some business between Swinsco and Carey, and on this particular morning Andrew went with a message.

The little old doddering man who admitted him,—a



very wretched man, who had known the house in its gilded days and now wept over its meager desolation—led him fumbling down endless passages, past endless doors, some of which he opened and pushed his shining old head into, shaking it mournfully at the blank emptiness and snuffling a little at the dank, musty smell.

Andrew, then, found Tarnia in the only room they used—the library. Found her high up against the great bookcases on the uppermost rung of the ladder, a book on her knees, a cream-colored monkey snuggling against her breast. He came slowly into the room and stared up at her, as she stared down at him.

“It was you I passed the other evening?”

And Andrew, his eyes still fixed on her, answered: “Yes. . . . And it was you . . .?”

She asked reflectively, “Who are you?” And when he told her, said with sudden sharpness:

“A relation of Ayerst Swinsco?”

“Not to him, nor any soul!”

It was then she made a most extraordinary remark: “Neither am I! I stand alone.”

Somewhat puzzled, Andrew asked: “There is your father——?”

She pressed the monkey nearer to her, and with one hand caressed its ears. “If I told you my father was dead and buried many, many miles from here, you would think me a mad woman! Yet I am alone; more than that—I am used to my loneliness.”

He took a step toward her. “Then there should be a bond between us—you and me?”



She told him slowly, "Why I do not know I have a bond with any man."

He answered then, "Nor I with any woman!" And then hesitated as though the challenge in her eyes caught him unawares.

She asked, "Well, then—well?"

The challenge was in her voice now—she might have flung him down a glove, a token—she might have been waiting for him to pick it up.

He said slowly, "I think you are different from any other woman . . ."

She smiled very faintly, "Is that all?"

It would seem then that he stooped and picked up that gage, answering with his own challenge:

"I have met so very few, so I know so very little. I might ask . . ."

And then he stopped again. She questioned, "What would you ask?"

"For you to teach me. . . ."

For the first time she laughed. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

### I

**I** MAY disappoint you, but I cannot say what else passed between them afterward. That is, if anything further did pass. You must remember though, to a very great extent, I was a witness of most of these events; others were simply repeated to me—ragged and unarranged the greater part of them—from Andrew, from Tarnia, from obscure persons whose names I have forgotten and whose connection with this story is so insignificant I have never troubled to remember them. Such as they were, I have endeavored to string them together in some decent form or setting. There has been no deliberate intent at additions of my own. Certain suggestions, suppositions even, I may be guilty of, but I offer no apology for them: they were necessary to link up the story.

Therefore, whether or no that fragmentary talk of these two ended with such abruptness, I cannot tell; I only know there appeared a sudden silence about them, and I remember no further allusion to any other meeting; neither to my knowledge did Andrew ever go again to Coltons. And the first time I ever saw them together was one afternoon on the Tilling land, and

that was some little time after Andrew had taken it in charge, and Ayerst departed to London.

I have already told you of the new dike running parallel with the road: part of it formed a boundary to Tilling land with a rude bridge here and there to get across to it; but the actual entrance, the position where farm buildings would be if such were ever erected and where now a barn or so stood, was from the lane which led you eventually to Mellow Farm.

It was from this opening I crossed the fields that day, and came upon them from behind, standing against one of the rough plank bridges staring over the road and the marsh land beyond it.

Looking back on it now, I remember how tranquil that afternoon was; how utterly placid, how great a hush lay about the land. An autumn sun, rather tawny and gentle, dropping away out to sea, and taking its indolent time to sink away out of sight. Even the earth had taken on that ruddy autumn look. Stained leaves and half-stripped trees, dank grass and naked gorse, mud and sand and shadows: slipping, sliding altogether out to the sea. A sudden flight of wild geese, their wings flushed red as they surged before the light, yet uttering no sound as they rushed on their way.

They stood there then, these two; not very close, yet close enough for the shadow from her hat to throw the slightest shadow on his face, and once, as she moved, her sleeve grazed his bare arm. There was something very quiet in the attitude; they were talking,

yet the murmur of their voices did not drift over to me. . . . For my part, let it be confessed, I remained where I was, looking at them. . . . Staring with a kind of uncertain relief, a feel of extraordinary comfort as if I was at last looking on something I had spent my whole life searching for. . . . How to account for it I do not know.

Yet one thing was certain. In my rough way my love was a very deep thing for these two: oh, yes, even for the woman whom I had known so short a time. And I liked to see them standing together: I knew then I wanted to see them so always side by side.

## 2

How long I might have remained there, and whether I would have gone to them, or slipped softly away, hugging my fancy to my breast, I cannot say. Quite suddenly, from behind, stepping daintily, moving softly, there came Cathy exceedingly pretty in spotted muslin, exceedingly cool beneath a shaded hat! Oh, yes, and I was n't the least bit pleased to see her! At that moment she interrupted me. She spoke immediately. And in the quiet of that evening her rather high, yet pleasing enough voice sounded sudden and sharp. It jarred my contentment even as it jarred the stillness. And yet— She was so very pretty—so very young! What business had I to resent her coming?

“Good evening, Mr. Penrose! Are you going to stand there all the time?”

I smiled at her: "Not entirely. I came to speak to Andrew."

She darted a quick glance at me and then to where he stood with Tarnia.

"And has it taken you all this while to make up your mind what to say?" Her curiosity was so obvious, it even surprised me.

I cried: "Hullo! Miss Sharp-eyes!"

Her voice took on an impatient note. "I came by Long Meadow and climbed the gate. You know when you do that you can see right down here; I noticed you then; that was all."

She seemed distinctly put out by now. And I was quick to notice it and, I think, the reason. She was pretty jealous of me, that was the truth: I had a trick of butting in upon her chatter with Andrew. She did n't like that. She knew well enough how Andrew frequently passed her house for mine and never so much as glanced her way: she knew above all things I grudged as much time away from the boy as she resented my having with him! She was well aware of all these things in her own inquisitive little way. Yet here was I loitering in a kind of dream, paying no heed to the moments he and Tarnia idled away together!

"I'm that kind of fellow, Miss Cathy! I rather like dawdling about."

She started to walk toward them. "I thought you did n't like wasting time?"

I followed her leisurely. "Oh, it depends, Miss

Cathy—it always depends.” And I saw her sharp little shoulders jerk impatiently.

I don’t think she had ever met Tarnia before. But I imagine she knew of her, for old Yardley had been often enough up at Coltons, and done some business over the timber there.

I don’t know how Andrew introduced them. But I saw Tarnia extend her hand in her grave gentle fashion, and Cathy take it rather unwillingly, and then, as I had expected, proceeded to state my offense. It seemed to amuse Andrew. There was a mischievous look about his face—such a look, too, I observed with relief, on Tarnia’s: there were twinkling lights in her eyes and the twist of a smile on her lips. I cried:

“I say! Has Miss Cathy been giving away my character?” and looked at her and laughed, because of the four of us she was the least at ease.

Andrew said, grinning away, “Oh, you’ve lost it now entirely!”

And Tarnia gravely added, “Won’t you try and recapture it again?”

“It went years ago,” I told them. “I’ve so forgotten its existence that I should n’t know what to look for!”

Andrew turned to Cathy with dancing eyes: “I say, Miss Cathy, what shall we do with such a man?”

But Cathy’s humor was obviously very bad. She answered ungraciously:

“I really don’t know. I suppose it’s Mr. Penrose’s affair, anyway.”



I saw Tarnia look at her quickly and suddenly, and then turn away to say to me quietly:

"I rather wish you had come over to us. I was hearing so much about the shipwreck. You might have told me more about this land," and she turned and stared away over the marshes. And then went on softly, and there was, perhaps, just the tinge of sadness in that softness, "I am trying to love it."

I said: "If you don't want to like it, I should be deaf when Andrew talks! He sees it as a kind of enchanted place, and sometimes I wonder if he's not forced its spell about me; for I've never stayed so long in one place, and I've been here nearly ten years now!"

She answered. "I have been in so many odd, strange places; but I never remember such a sinister look as these parts seem to have!"

Andrew said abruptly: "Oh, yes, it's sinister enough! It's ugly, secretive. Life and death! It's one and the same here. I suppose I have n't much to thank it for! Yet I shall stick it out, I suppose!" And he dug with his heel into the brown earth.

She turned to him then, and there was a sort of light upon her face, as if some fire smoldered within her and flared out red-hot. She cried:

"Ah, yes! But you can find so much here. You can bury yourself in its solitude and yet drag some life out. But I can't—I can't. I only see it with eyes that ache at its immense nakedness. If I could see it living! If I could watch it moving! Find compas-

sion in it, who knows? But it seems to be beyond all silences—brooding darkly. . . . Secretive? Ah, yes! But what good comes from secrets?”

She spoke with a kind of hopeless note about her voice. She threw this question at him with a suggestion of despair about it. As though she failed to see any answer. . . .

Andrew said, “But you can’t think it a dead thing,” in that hesitating, thinking way of his that was so well known to me when he was digging hard to get at the root of some matter. “Is n’t it possible to find some good out of most things?”

The light died from her face, and I could see a look of intense compassion about her mouth and the deep depths of her eyes. “Oh!” she answered very softly, and I saw her hand half went out to him and then fell to her side . . . “Oh, can you believe that?”

Cathy stepped in then—Cathy distinctly bored, and by now in a state of fidgets, verging on a positive lack of good manners. “Well!” she said snappishly, “I don’t see what good can come out of this silly old place except turnips and carrots! Any more than *you* can see secrets! It’s dull—that’s about all. If it was n’t for Boston being fairly near it would be awful. That’s what I wanted to find you out for”; and she turned to Andrew with a quick return to her usual dainty little ways of expression. “Auntie has a party on Tuesday, and she’d be very pleased if you’d come; and I hope you will, for then you can drive me over. Dad

won't spare the horse, so it means the carrier and that 's horrid! Now you will say 'yes,' won't you?"

She was quite pleasant again, was Cathy. All smiles and prettiness, her little pointed face turned eager and winningly up to Andrew—her fair curls bobbing in the most engaging fashion beneath her hat. There was nothing for him to do but to answer her; to twist his mind away from the marshes and bring it round to suit Cathy's mood.

Tarnia had turned away to where her horse stood snuffing grass at the roadside and I followed her, leaving Andrew muttering in a dazed sort of way: "Tuesday, Tuesday? Now what on earth's wrong with Tuesday?"

While Cathy took him up with a clear laugh. "Nothing, Mr. Sartor—nothing. No excuses, if you please!"

The big gray horse and Tarnia were having much conversation on their own when I came up to them. She was rubbing his ears and whispering into them, while he transferred his affection from the grass to the big buttons on her jacket. She turned to me as I approached:

"Have you ever seen such a monster?"

I put a hand on the huge flank, and the great soft nostrils turned in my direction with a questioning puff.

"He's a tremendous fellow!"

That pleased her, and she smiled.

"Like a child, really," she went on. "So terribly pettish if I don't give him sugar each morning!"

And then, taking up the reins, "Come along, my dear, time to be going!"

She was in the saddle before I had moved forward to help her; then as she sat there meditative, serious, she asked suddenly, "Is there any chance of Andrew leaving here?"

And I remember that I felt uncommonly stupid as I stared at her in a blank sort of manner, and muttered: "Leaving? No! Why should he?"

She looked at me frowning slightly, and I felt decidedly foolish.

She continued: "I can't believe any good can come to him here. *Must* he stay? She was looking at me very intently.

I told her: "He would not go now unless he were turned out! There's too much affection with him for the old man—of loyalty. He feels it would be a mean thing to clear out. He's not the kind to hurt the trust that's been given him!"

She nodded. "I see that—I like that! But afterward! What becomes of the farm?"

"Afterward? There you have me! I suppose it rests with Andrew. The property will go to Ayerst. What Ayerst may have to say, what Andrew will do, remains to be seen. I am inclined to swear, though, he'll not work for Ayerst."

That seemed to relieve her. She drew a great breath. She said sharply, "I do most earnestly hope not!"

I asked her, curiously, "Do you dislike Ayerst so

much?" And having said this I was instantly sorry. For the old haunting feeling of something unknown—un-understandable, the strange touch of the desert and Egypt, now seemed to reappear and wrap her close.

She said gravely: "I don't know that I like or dislike any one! I don't know many things! Does it matter?"

And though her lips were faintly smiling, her eyes were secret—inscrutable.

## 3

I can imagine nothing more foolish than an attempt to build other people's castles. And yet here was I busy with my clay, making my bricks, fixing my scaffolding, visioning before me a most splendid edifice, a very perfect palace: all about Andrew and Tarnia.

Believe me, it would have been impossible not to build those castles! Chance had played a curious trick on me! Uprooted, as it were, from my very depths, all my trapesing ways, and settled me in an idle enough place to watch at my leisure whatever business there might be. Seven people withal, who roused any interest whatsoever! Seven only for that matter who were of any consequence in that village! Yet I stayed on! The circle that held them was small enough—narrow enough; devoid of any trappings, stripped of any unusual excitement. Still, in a dog-like manner I nosed about within, smelled out here, snuffed around there, sat back on my haunches with patience I never



thought was mine—sat well back and stared ahead and through the thicket beyond, as though from the immensity of life there would spring out some equally immense riddle!

If it is possible, I scented it in the sea spray when Andrew first came unknown and naked to this land. I think it is more than possible—it is, in fact, almost a certainty—I knew it for something alive, terrific, when Tarnia came to Coltons; when I first saw her and Andrew together; not mine to solve it, not mine to join the pieces! Nevertheless, I was off at a huge pace about my castle building, and even as I laid my first brick with a most romantic trowel I had my rebuke. Ayerst came back to Mellow Farm.

## 4

Extraordinary and unlooked for this return. A sending back, in fact, with a decidedly sooty label attached.

I have told you open house had been offered him by a brother of old Swinsco's solicitors at Lincoln? A most respectable brother, a wealthy broker moving in a select and highly respectable circle, and exceedingly willing to open it widely to Ayerst. Unfortunately, neither the circle nor Ayerst got on so very well together, and the result was that he amused himself in his own way and that was with a pretty but remarkably artful housemaid. It is a dangerous game to play with housemaids, but if it must be done it should be with exceeding skill. And that is exactly



how Ayerst fell. He was careless, clumsy if you like. And when she played her trump card, as she did, she had him fairly by the throat and he yapping at her feet! Almost unbelievable, eh? The smooth cunning Ayerst, caught in a nicely prepared trap! And you'd think he'd find a hole out, a crack to slide through, a lie to fix her lie! Not a bit of it—not a sign!

A new Ayerst this. A shambling, white-livered kind of dog, blinking and slinking round odd corners, mouthing his panic, and sweating in every portion of his coward's body lest she would force him to crown her with orange-blossoms as a grand finale to his wretchedness. Here his fears were utterly groundless. Truth be told she had a husband, and had played this trick for paper possessing more value than a marriage certificate. This was the stuff, then, she tried to press him for. This the hidden card, and the point she had been so artfully leading up to. He was cornered! Now for the tweezers! Oh, she was an expert, that woman! She twitched and twisted him, and shook her fists and wrung her hands. Her tongue cut him like the point of a sword, and every breath showered down threats and abuse. There was no prettiness about her now; she was merely a spitting cat of a creature, and Ayerst had an excellent taste of the exquisite sharpness of her claws!

After writhing and twisting and turning beneath her sting, he tried to get his wits into some order, and thereby rose to the heights of desperation, or maybe

the depths of stupidity. His banking account being the most desolate and empty thing, he desperately enough tried his hand at the oldest trick in the world. He forged his father's signature on a check made out to himself!

All said and done, it is a clumsy sort of game, and a sharper brained fellow would have cold-shouldered it. I am not doubting Ayerst's ability when it come to the copying. He knew it well enough; he must have seen many a time those old fingers carefully, painfully tracing the letters. And I don't suppose there was any biting at the heart of him when he settled down to that imitation! I can see him—can't you? In his neat and spruce bedroom in the neat and spruce house of the neat and spruce broker. Very doggish about the waistcoat and cravat—tongue in cheek, fingers somewhat knuckly, long legs awkwardly coiled about a well-shaped but quite possibly unsteady table, mopping at intervals his well-perfumed head with an equally well-perfumed handkerchief; fixing one pale eye on a recently arrived letter and the other one on his own paper. . . . One on that letter! Such a letter that: when you think how laboriously that old hand must have clutched a spluttering quill to form ill-shaped and desperately tender words to this son of his! Hoping he is "well," hoping he has "much enjoyment," hoping he will "write soon"; hoping—and there is a sudden rough shyness here, I suspect—that he will be "home" soon; then ending with the abrupt formula, "Your affectionate father, Rueben Swinsco."

Oh, well, he got it done at last to his liking. And apparently the rest, to his idea, was easy going. But a bank who knows of a customer nothing more than a short introduction most certainly will not oblige with due speed when the balance is nil and the figure desired runs into three! They told this Ayerst, with the polite enough suggestion that he should call in again in two or three days' time. Rather a nasty put-back this; highly unpleasant those next few days, made up of perpetually dodging the snapping housemaid, and blinking with unusual intensity at the frequent arising of many and uncommonly harassing thoughts! And when he did try again, decidedly jaunty in appearance, with the devil of a swagger air about his hat, they told him "no news"; they therefore regretted . . . but . . . and it was the "but" that cooked the goose!

The housemaid, on being told, fairly and finally flounced. She flounced straight into the respectable broker's office just as he was being shocked out of his usual nicety of ways and respectable mind by a letter from old Swinsco. Doubtless she shocked him all the more, and most certainly assured him of the distress of that communication. There was absolutely nothing else to be done than to fold it most carefully away, take an extra pinch of snuff, and settle to a decidedly uncongenial conversation! You may be sure that he did this, and so far as this story is concerned that is the last of that unhappy gentleman and the head-tossing housemaid.

## 5

Not a very pleasant episode, and one well rid of; but essential in its way to this yarn, because of the new and startling insight it showed to Ayerst's character. It was actually a sort of link between two moods; a kind of join between two strangely different natures that made one whole of Ayerst. "Hang-dog" Ayerst, with a thick white streak down the very stomach of him, and the easy, gentle, non-committal Ayerst, with unknown thoughts tucked carefully away beneath those remarkably pale eyelids, and disdainful amusement hanging from their very lashes. . . . A link! A most astounding opening.

And it was in this last nature, that old and well-known mood, that he returned again to Mellow Farm, to Ditchling.

After all, there was nothing very surprising about this quick and ready change. Take it from Ayerst's point of view; see it with his usual tolerance. This burden which had pressed him so uncomfortably had been most delicately removed. There were no chains dragging him, or perpetually turning screws screwing him most vilely. The ever-ready law had seen to that in the most careful manner, had removed all annoyance to the least prick. With one hand it had methodically untied those troublesome knots, while, with the other, it sealed red seals in such a way as to pacify the housemaid, yet at the same time leaving Ayerst free to kick as he liked.

The whole business was dead. Why worry? "Hangdog" Ayerst then was most neatly buried and put away. Here is our soft-stepping friend once more, with much lip homage to pave his way.

This the Ayerst presenting himself to old Swinsco a few minutes after his return. In the back parlor this interview—a sort of best room where the old man did accounts at a worn and battered bureau, and kept on a somewhat dusty table a gigantic and terrifically illustrated Bible—a thing of great brass clasps and corners, filled throughout with notices of births and deaths and marriages of dead and bygone Swinscos; and read and thumbed by each one of them.

In this room, then: the old man, most desolate and somewhat huddled down in his chair; soft-stepping Ayerst, deprecating and a trifle bored, at the door. . . . So they faced each other. Old gray, gaunt wolf, and this most gentle trickster: this soft speaker and most perfect shuffler!

There was nothing noisy about this scene, I imagine! Ayerst was not of the shouting kind, neither would the old man yelp shrilly over his scars: nothing of that—and for a space profound silence!

The acute agony then of Swinsco! The fearful persistence with which hundreds of devil teeth must have been gnawing at his seared heart as he stared at his son. . . . Jerking out of him at last a most bitter truth:

"An' I lied for ye. . . ."



Extraordinary and remarkable jubilation on the part of soft-stepping Ayerst. Tremendous and highly pleasant twangings within his brain, within his heart, within his soul at this hearing. What of this? What lie? . . . And to what purpose? The check? . . . Was it possible?

And then with studied care to old Swinsco:

"Dear Father! If I have vexed you, may I not explain?" Delightfully silky that voice—of the very finest quality.

But old gray wolf—his great head on his great chest . . . thinking—thoughts that are like red-hot needles probing and working down to the very depth of his heart . . . wondering—was it once possible that that voice had been the splendid cause to make him raise that same tired head in triumph on high?

He simply repeated, "Lied for ye! Lied!" Those terrific hands must have clutched and striven with the chair arms as if something could come from the wood and give him support—support for the agony of this most damnable truth. . . . "Lied, lied, lied! And my name has known no liars, has given birth to no thieves!"

A wretched sort of business this for Ayerst, eh? You can picture him with a most lamentable fidget about his crooked mouth, fidgeting first to his toes and then to his heels. Very soft about it; very soft about his whole manner—possibly resigned as to the over-fussiness of old people, but resigned with most



deprecating meekness. There is remarkably little for him to say—you may be sure he knows that and says it with due nicety.

“Ah, dear Father. . . .”

But there is something yet to be said by old Swinsco, and he lets it off like a rocket, so that Ayerst on his toes comes down with hurt surprise to his heels.

“That girl!” shouts out the old voice. “That girl! Were ye of the mud that ye must pick of the mud? Gie kisses to it, lie fur it, turn thief fur it?”

If there was anything comic about this matter to Ayerst before, you may be pretty certain it was intensified now. All his rocket-shooting because of that flirtation! Soft-stepping Ayerst, with an unusual speed for him, closes his eyes entirely; he would not disclose those mocking impatient lights to this great wolf, his treading is always exceedingly precise and careful. His answer is politely murmured:

“My dear Father, I know it was silly; yet I suppose each one of us does do such things!”

A sort of snap then in that old brain, a kind of jerk right in the very heart of him, letting out the sudden violent cry:

“And must ye *sink* to do them? Must ye turn most mucky rogue? My son—my son! Come here to me. Let me look at ye—touch ye; see ye as I must see ye—sommat new, sommat different.”

And like a flash—as soft-stepping Ayerst stood with due humility at his side—up went those huge,

steel-like arms, tough and long and brown, with tough and long brown hairs sticking from their flesh, while his hands, great hard things like iron hooks, caught those lying shoulders, gripped and dug into them as though he would crush the very life away, crush and break this mocking figure that is shame, this most hideous lie that is Ayerst! Forcing him then to the ground, to bend down to that pale face and mutter:

"Or is there no difference? Has there never been all these years? Am I Isaac—blind, blind? You were the littlest thing that ever was when I took ye up and called ye God-sent. Not o' my blood! What matter? I reckoned I'd claim ye fur it; I reckoned there'd be a time when my soul could call you blessed. . . . Afore you stole my name and lied wi' it fur your fun, you stole somethin' else—you took the very heart o' me, and I gave it willingly, willingly! *Now*, like my body, it be a poor maimed thing; like my pride it be heavy in sorrow. . . . That I should live to call ye 'son' with shame! Get you gone! Fur you ha' closed up the very strength o' me."

The veil was rent and the walls thundering about his head! He had built his house—he had pillared his temple. After all these years it stood empty; after all these years it was but a thing of dust and rottenness. . . . The glory had departed the business was finished. There was no harvest only weeds.

## 6

Yet somehow I think—I believe—oh, well, then,

I know! There did come a sudden jar to Ayerst! A sort of rebuke to that smoothness! That gleam in your eyes betrays your pleasure! The more punchings the better, eh? His kind though shows mighty few bruises; yet, as things turned out, he got the graze of one—from Miss Swinsco.

Ayerst then moving softly into the kitchen—Miss Swinsco moving with hard, quick padding feet up to him. Eyes like two shining buttons, fat hands, fatly clenched into two plump balls. Miss Swinsco hissing at him like a steam engine:

“What’s he said? What have you said?”

Soft-stepping Ayerst, with all the insolence of his smooth kind: “My dear aunt, what should he say?”

Those ball-fists are tighter and rounder yet; she jabs with them both toward Ayerst.

“Put sense to your tongue, can’t you? He can say much—do much! What? What? What?”

The yawn has to come, and you may be pretty sure it does, and with it the loosening of the drawl.

“How can I remember? The usual sort of lecturing. You ought to have been at the keyhole! I tell you I’ve forgotten!”

The hard fat balls are suddenly unrolled and about his arm in square, podgy fingers.

“You’ll forget too often one day, young fool that you are! Open your eyes now! See if you can’t remember one thing.”

One thing! It is Andrew coming up the drive from his work. Andrew in an empty wagon, whis-

ting as he goes. Andrew peering toward the parlor window and waving his hand. Andrew!

For one instant there is a sudden reappearance of Hangdog Ayerst, for one instant the white streak presses unpleasantly close to him! Andrew. . . .

That is always the way with chance—and it was just that which brought Andrew up the drive then, as it had brought him years back from the sea's belly to Ditchling.

## CHAPTER VII

### I

**N**O man cares to go hungry. And as it is the accepted fact food is the maintenance of the body, the well-fed hearts of this world stuff to their bellyful. But it is a very different sort of matter when Hope spreads her wings and leaves you solitary. Eating then is of no consequence; it is then starvation pure and simple has its consolations. For whereas with the one, death is a snug enough harbor, with the other the trickery of the business is utterly fearful: nine times out of ten man goes on living. That is his tragedy, that, if you will, his very naked hell stretched out before him!

That is what happened to old Swinsco. He went on with life. He groped with his hands and met nothing but despair; he stood on the very edge of the pit that spelled oblivion, and death simply shook his head and busied himself with other matters: for the moment he felt no interest in this desolate figure.

It was in the early spring that the agony caught him. Summer and winter and spring again came and went, yet Life still chirped and chirruped with him, in the most dutiful manner. A most persistent

hussy, in fact; and no man was more sick to be rid of her than old Swinsco, but she liked her nest.

Nevertheless, some part there was dead; something had passed right away from him. A closing up, a shutting down, a letting go of some tremendous and most vital force. Mark you, there was no assured sign of collapse. That is why, when such a thing did happen, it came with so much surprise. It was in his eyes you saw the flight of that spirit. It was in his eyes you saw the thing that made you catch your breath. . . . Dog-like! That is the word. As an old dog patiently resigned for things unknown and un-understandable, so was Swinco. Dog-like. . . . Waiting, expectant, brooding. On what? For what? Listening! Just that! Listening. . . . As the old dog for Pluto's horn, so now with Swinsco for God's touch.

He clung to that parlor now, and for nothing, excepting his meals, did he leave it. After all they held something for him, those four walls. It had been to that room—gay in its bridal splendor—he had brought his young wife that long-ago day of their marriage. . . . It had been in that room they had lain her out in her coffin, with flowers all about her and the dead child at her breast. In that room (the kitchen being too noisy) he had watched with pride his own son, Ayerst, bend over his lesson-books. There he had questioned: "An' what's that you're learning of?"

Hearing Ayerst's unwilling murmur, "Latin."



To mutter, "Eh, Latin, Latin . . ." and with sudden gruff attempt at authority, "What's that word?"

And from Ayerst with that selfsame raise of his brows: "*Domini*, Father—a lord."

"A lord, eh? Well, well, who'd ha' thought it! A lord! . . ." And his eyes would travel slowly to a somewhat faded portrait over the mantel-shelf. . . . "A lord!"

## 2

I cannot conceive anything more exasperating to both Ayerst and his well-covered aunt than this closed-in attitude of old Swinsco: this more or less settling down to a life which, to all intents and purposes, simply did not know them. They did not see that listening, patient look; I doubt if they thought of the vision which forever held him fast. To them he was simply an old man: not so old as to let the reins of authority slip from his hands and keep the work of the farm within his bounds; but old enough to retire so deeply into himself as to be entirely apart from them, doggedly silent, and this is what exasperated Miss Swinsco beyond endurance—silent, and unapproachable on all manner and kind of things she wished to know and never would know until he was put away beside his wife in Ditchling Churchyard.

Through this business with Ayerst she had been unpleasantly disturbed—put about, as the saying is, fidgeted, and curious as to how much lay behind this deadly cloak of reserve, what was going on? Be-

ing thought out? Each day, each night, her irritation increased; and the old man lived. And as long as he did so must this spark smolder and simmer within her. She wanted to heap earth upon him and dig out the secrets he held so close.

For the rest she had one thing to be thankful for. Her religious fervor could go its own way; his eagle eyes passed it by unobserved. It always seemed to me extraordinary that such a woman could bend and bow and pray with as much passion as Miss Swinsco evidently did. She was so sure her candle had been lit, her call had sounded. I am firmly convinced she spent hours on her knees wracked in the torment of almost fanatical prayer. For her religion, and therefore herself—she being the instrument to aid that worship—she prayed, and in her way waited for the time when she would be received by her faith, for the time when there was no other master but Ayerst, for the time when she could nestle in fat contentment, denying herself nothing—thereby denying her church less. . . . Waiting, in fact, when she might be called “blessed”—a word I sometimes think can be most vilely contorted.

## 3

Andrew would have it they were two ghouls gloating over a possible corpse.

“You ought to hear Ayerst,” he snorted one day . . . “With his perpetual ‘Goodnight, dear Father, I hope you ’ll sleep well!’ And ‘Good morning, dear

Father, I do hope you've had a good night.' I tell you it's the most damnable humbug there ever was! What he wants to say is, 'Good night, and I hope to God I'll never see your face again!' And 'Good morning, and O Lord, what a bore, you're still here!' The mouthing hypocrite that he is!"

I said, "Well, you'd hardly get any one to spit out that sort of truth."

"No, but if he were half the man he is he would n't tie every speech in such pretty lies!"

"And what of Miss Swinsco?"

"That woman!" Andrew became unusually violent in the filling of his pipe. "Oh, she goes into action in quite another way. His soul seems to be her concern, and would you believe it, in her extraordinary way she's just as feverish about it as she ever has been with this amazing religious business all along!"

It did n't surprise me, and I said so.

"There are such who pray and curse with the same breath, and their nursing is every wit as true as their praying! I imagine, in their own remarkable way, the one is a kind of passport for the other!"

Andrew grunted. "Oh, well, that's her method. And if she had the pluck I firmly believe she'd have her priests in the house. Holy water and all!"

"She would n't dare. Not while he's living."

"She'll dare soon enough when he's dead." A sort of change came over his face. "You know, Penrose, it's an awful thing to sit and watch some one

each day of your life and know they're mighty close to passing out of it! It's a fearful thing to know your own helplessness, to know the being you care for is going out of the reach of your hands and you can do nothing but watch it slip by. . . . Slip away from you! And confound you with its mystery. . . . It's like an open door that you can but stare at, knowing its opening or closing is no business of yours. And then it shuts, and it's over—there's absolutely nothing left to watch for."

I asked, somewhat grumpily: "And pray what about me? I suppose you've marked me down with one leg, if not two, in the grave?"

He put out a hand and caught my arm and gripped it hard. "Don't say that sort of thing, old friend! I'm a selfish beast, I know . . . the way I sometimes talk. You and the old man! Believe me, the very best things in my life! Now to lose one of you. . . . Time, you see, is the very devil! How can I know how far his sweepings may go? Sometimes I think he'll pay me out and let me pass as I came—solitary!"

It was then some old impulse made me ask, "And what of Tarnia?"

His hand dropped away from me, and fumbled with his handkerchief. "Tarnia? Miss Carey? Why—what on earth. . . ." He stared at me, and repeated: "Tarnia. . . ."

I said, "Well, you count her as your friend, don't you?"

He made no direct reply to my question; he simply

went on: "She has her own set path—it does n't run alongside with me. Why should it? Why should I expect such a thing from her—from any woman? Friendship. . . ." He said it in an odd, jerky manner. "Women. . . . What have they to do with me? Even the sea grudged me one."

I did n't answer that; the same impulse made me stubbornly stick to my first remark.

"I saw you in Lincoln the other day with her."

He smiled the slightest. "The devil you did! Then why on earth did n't you join us?"

I shook my head. "I had other things on hand, and my hurry was frantic."

He did n't seem to have heard me. He was staring away across the flat, baking earth to where the hot sullen sea stirred sluggish and fretful.

He said presently: "We went into the cathedral. They were practising some anthem. . . ."

I answered, "I never thought you liked music."

He said curtly: "I can't say I do overmuch. This was different; there is something about an organ that stirs you like wind over the hills! It is so utterly immense—all the sounds of the world singing and shouting about your ears!"

He was still staring away across the Fens; and as I looked it seemed to me that nature in her wild impetuous way had patterned her likeness very deeply and passionately upon this son of hers! Earth, sea, and sky! . . . No primitive man could have been fashioned closer. Like a live thing—and who can

deny its life? Earth had nursed him to her own rich color, even as the sea, having once cradled him, had left him with her blueness smudged about his eyes! So, too, must the black racing clouds have noticed him and rained their darkness about his head. One with nature! And like some tree of her planning, put out into the waste to fight its way up against the storm—the trickery of life and life's moods!

I must confess it was the sudden thought of him in this spirit that made me deaf to his speaking. Quite suddenly, as it were, from a tremendous way off, I heard him saying:

"I tell you, Penrose, it was a tremendous thing, that psalm! There was one bit they sang; it was this, I think: 'God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. . . .' Is n't that utterly splendid? Just what life should be! The coming and going! A great shout. . . . As Tarnia said, a trumpet-call!"

## 4

A trumpet-call! Through the dim distance of all the mystery of birth. In that strange twilight of existence we call childhood, in the morning of that time we name youth, through those days and nights, so must its pipings have come nearer and nearer to these two—Tarnia and Andrew. Until now—*now*, with a rushing sound like the roar of many wings, it was to crash about their ears, to thunder out its trumpetings, to make preparation. You ask for what? Man, when



the bugle rings it out on the field, what follows? . . .  
The fight!

It must have been close on two weeks before I saw him again. All that time he had been a mere speck on the fields—fleet of foot and hot at his work. I tell you at that time Andrew was utterly splendid—vigorous to his very finger-tips; swift, with the swiftness of a hawk; alive—as a colt is—eager after more living.

Then, one evening, some time in July I think, he came down to my cottage; drank my cider, smoked my tobacco, grinned away at me through the smoke, and remarked:

“I’m not at all sure if I’m not in a vile temper! On the other hand I may be in a perfect one. . . . Which are you prepared to bet on?”

I said, very sarcastically, “As you’ve come to me, I naturally conclude the worse.”

This made him laugh so much that I rather think it settled the question of mood. He said in his jolliest way:

“What an old liar you are, Penrose! If I do growl, it’s mostly your fault! You encourage me in it; I swear you do! Or, anyway, you punch so much good thought into me that I cheerfully growl away to get hit! To-night I’m restless, impatient—impatient, Penrose, and I’m damned if I know why, or what for! I seem to be up against something that I can’t rightly see through. I don’t even know if I want to see! And then—I feel this sort of nervous restlessness that

I ought to—that I'm missing something. Now what—what?"

He got up and walked to the open door to frown out at the darkened street.

He went on, "Old fuddle-face Tegg came over the other day."

I asked in some surprise: "What, the mighty Tegg of Tegg Bounderby? Honored, were n't you?"

He turned back again to the room. "That's the splendid fellow. He was going just as I got back for dinner. I imagined he'd been there on business for the old man. Funny thing, he usually behaves as if I were a yard boy, but that morning he was fairly all over me! Fussing and fiddling in his usual fiddling and fussy way, and this time about me! Why, I'm hanged if he has n't even asked me over to his place to any meal almost I care to choose. He's gone to London now; this startling favoritism begins immediately he returns!"

I said, "Is this because you've been the good boy, and Ayerst the bad?"

With his usual disrespectfulness, Andrew gave a jerk at my few remaining hairs.

"Ass that you are, Penrose! As a matter of fact, I don't believe they know so very much about that business!"

He went on reflectively: "I rather wish I'd stayed with the old man to-night. Somehow—I don't know! He did n't seem as fit as usual. I wanted to, but he would n't hear to it. He became his dear, stubborn

self again and fairly hustled me out. These days I sometimes feel he's different with me. It may be my imagination—conceit, if you like! Yet such as I am, I hope it's something more than that, something bigger. This evening, when I said good night to him, I could almost swear he said 'my son.' . . . He put his hand on my head, in that gentle way I have sometimes seen him touch a dog. 'My son!'

## 5

Later on that evening we went to the Smuggler's Arms. You remember the place? It had been my first introduction to Ditchling—more than that, it had been a sort of prelude to the entire rearranging of my life. Curiously enough, though, I am prepared to swear I was not the only person who had stayed—even for an hour—between its crazy walls, and had left on the highroad to fresh beginnings! Think what you please, it was decidedly odd! Such an insignificant, comfortless sort of place, and yet so great a magnet to all sorts and kinds of men. I say men, because I never remember meeting a woman there; but of men! I tell you they packed it to its uttermost. Not the village folk alone, mind you! But from other places along the Fens—from Boston, even Freiston, Butterwick, Wainfleet. They crammed the one room to its tiniest corner. Stealthily by boat, noisily by cart, lumpishly by foot. Each in their way took the road to it. But of their kind not one of them had ever stayed a night; even those who were fairly swollen

with drink were pitched out drunken to sleep in the gutter if they could not find their legs!

It must have been somewhere about ten when we got to the inn. As usual it swarmed with life. A regular fog of a room—stenching with beer and tobacco, stenching also of overmuch humanity and insufferably hot from the same unpleasant reasons and the clamping of the two low windows. There was a great old junk of a lamp swinging on rusty chains from the rafters, a great black pot of a thing, with a crooked, flaring flame. Light of a kind also from two flaming torches stuck either side of the high mantel-shelf, spluttering and smelling vilely.

Grainger, the son, my old friend, if you remember our first meeting, moodily served at the bar, with an even more unhealthy-looking youth as his assistant. The old woman was dead; her yellow petticoat and naked legs were the last I ever saw of her. When I got back from South America she had been separated from her bottles and tucked away beneath the ground: the rat of a son carried on. Neither did he make any difference in the methods and customs. . . . I am talking now of the inner and real existence of the inn; which had been abruptly made clear to me that night, years back, and was probably the reason that Grainger was surprisingly civil with his tongue and my supplies of spirits of a most excellent flavor!

He gave us a gloomy nod at our entrance, and to us was the honor of personal attendance by the pimply assistant.

I told you there were all manners and kinds at this place? I tell you that night it seemed as if from all the corners of the earth its motley inhabitants had drifted in! Sailors in gigantic topboots and jerseys and two terrifically tough navy Jacks; fishermen smelling abominably of fish and some still in oilskins; a grim-looking pilot in a trim-cut buttoned jacket and a rakish cap, laying down the law on pilotage with an enormous individual in an open shirt, soiled canvas trousers, and naked feet thrust into an immense pair of coarse boots, who might have been a pirate or a dockyard navy, or both! A giant of a negro, all teeth and shining ear-rings, his great chest naked and sweating, talking loudly and excitedly with a square, tigerish looking little chap, with a swagger twist of a beard, a colored handkerchief about his head, and a great knife dangling against his hip. A poor devil of a red-coat, a marine, sprawled heavily in a corner, mouth agape, eyes closed, breathing hideously, and at intervals bawling:

"Farewell and adieu-u-u to you, gay Spanish Ladi-e-e-es,  
Farewell and adieu-u-u to you, Ladies of S-p-a-i-n. . . ."

To finish it (God be thanked) in one wild hiccup.

For my part, once my glass was comfortably filled and my pipe well on the go, I devoted all my attention to the tiger-like fellow, with the clip of a beard. A jolly chap this! A bit of the desperado *Pistol* about him, a touch of fire-eating *Hotspur*. He was all bristles and scorn, with a way that was both attractive

and insolent. You expected him to walk on tiptoe—quick, impatient steps, as befitting a man accustomed to jerk out an oath and make up his mind all in one breath.

You could have seen him in any age; you would have known him in any country. He is of the kind that knows no change; he is of the folk who go on living—breathing again century after century, taking up life as some forebear left it—for what it is, for what it is likely to be; for how God or the devil may fix it up between them. Thus, if you close your eyes, he would vision before you in some ancient Phenician craft, bright with its painted sails, trading or fighting or both from Tyre to Carthage, from Carthage to India. . . . Well! You have but to open them now at any dock in any port; you will find him there. He has but moved on a space. Time has had little to do with him beyond making known to him steam and tap-rooms. . . . The law of women, the law of bargains, the law of the sea, with such things there is no change. . . . The spirit does but fly from one dead brother to make life in some newly adventuring one. . . .

It was Andrew who awakened me from my uncommonly pleasant dreams. "Poor old Grainger! They're ragging him like the deuce to-night."

I became instantly wide-awake. These bickerings between Grainger and the inmates of his inn were pretty frequent, and sometimes reached the most alarming heights. The fact was that poor old Grainger stood in a most extraordinary position with the whole



lot of them. No man, I suppose, was more hated; or rather of no man were they so utterly contemptuous. To a certain extent they gave him a somewhat grudging respect for his cunning in the matter of all traffickings—he was a priceless bargainer, and a master of such artfulness that possibly only the devil himself could compete with him! But he had a rat-like way with him, a pasty mean outlook, and all his qualities were pasty and mean, with a slinking, sly smell about his very breath. He was as full of suspicion as the sea of fishes and as crammed with secretiveness as a cask with beer. . . . And it was just that, I believe, that drove them mad. He was n't their leader, yet he had worked himself to such a position that they could ply no trade without him.

Such a position. Not a jot of reckless enterprise on his side. . . . But a most crafty fox, well up in trickery of foxes and the covering of trails! In his way, then, he was of certain importance. Perhaps that is too large a word; let us say useful! That was his actual position! Useful! In a sulky way they knew this, and if it exasperated them, which it most certainly did, they made up for it by teasing him like the very deuce! I tell you! Given a full room and a stomach full of liquor, they would use him like a performing bear, until the poor devil cut capers in sheer hysterical fury.

As Andrew had discovered, they were doing it now. And in this case they were harping on a most ticklish point. A thing that always got him on the raw and

made him squirm. . . . The mention of police matters.

Better say at once that any hint at the word put the fear of God into him. For you must know he stood in a holy funk of the law; and spent his wretched life planning and manœuvring to keep both himself and his tavern entirely virtuous and proper in their sight. . . . I think he succeeded. But those who knew, knew also this carefulness only went as far as he was concerned: for the rest, they might go hang!

This particular night, those who ragged him had the enjoyment of watching him rage even more than usual. From his point of view, it was natural enough, I suppose. All that part of the coast had lately received unusual and unwelcome attention! A somewhat over-successful gang of rogues had been taking a trifle too much interest in our direction. House-breaking was their little game; and I must say they carried it out with remarkable cuteness. But they overdid it in their zeal for other people's property, and an old woman had been killed and a young man badly smashed. No one had ever seen them and apparently they left no clues, until at last some hint was thrown out that they came by the sea, and the result was that pretty nearly every night all manner and kind of individuals, from plowboys to the chief constable himself, would patrol the coast and the villages; and it was this constant nearness of the police and the law generally that fairly twisted the wretched Grainger's nervous system inside out. He was, in fact, one bundle of quivering anticipation. If he had dared, I

think he 'd have closed the inn, but he knew the place would be virtually broken into by the men in the village, apart from the rest of its usual visitors. And that alone would probably mean inquisitive visiting on the part of the police. So he remained open and spent most of his time imploring them with the most passionate oaths and cursings to be less wild and free in their talk. To which, by way of an answer, they became even more riotous and twisted the tail of Grainger to their heart's content.

They were at him now with—

"You should watch our Jesse play kiss-in-th'-ring with th' blue-boys!"

"I say, Jesse! They got some o' they grand sharp chaps smellin' round! Take you care they don't be a-hiding in here."

And Grainger, with a wild stare round the room, would shrill out at them: "Kep them bloody mouths shut o' yourn! They'll fair rattle us t' hell, they will!"

Here the extraordinary individual with the naked feet and the hulking boots broke off his argument with the pilot to drawl solemnly: "Don't 'ee be afeared fur us—not on yourn life, my son! Not on yourn muddy life. There be no track from *us*! There be sea an' ships an' other land, all good things for the likes o' *we*! Don't 'ee be upset fur *us*—don't 'ee *now*!"

To which the wretched Grainger wailed aloud: "Easy fur you! What o' me? You an' yourn blasted shoutings—you'll ha' me in! You'll muck me life

curse an' damn yourn babbling mouths!" There was froth about his lips and sweat bubbling on his cheeks. He was positively grotesque in his panic, and it was exactly this grotesqueness, this coward buffoonery in him, which led them on. His last outburst only made them jeer back:

"What o' that rabbit hole o' yourn?"

"That 's it! Where 's the lil' spot you an' the old woman used to count th' bottles in?"

"Goard Almighty! I 'd give a day's pay to see our Jesse tuck away to cover. . . ."

I tell you, they mocked and goaded at him until even I began to feel sorry for the poor devil! And, anyway, they made such a perfectly terrific noise that I was uncommonly glad to hear Andrew shout, "I say, shall we go? I shall be a deaf man in another second!"

I nodded, and emptied my glass to the very dregs. And at that moment something happened. Happened then and there as I replaced the tumbler on the table. As swift as a flash of lightning—as you might snap your fingers.

6

It was unexpected, and it was that which made it so startling. It was swiftness itself—it was the most violent and unforeseen thing. The negro started it—the little man with the jutting beard and the colored handkerchief finished it off. . . . The real beginnings are vague enough—there had been some talk from the little man of his girl down Boston way; a trifle too

much drink on the part of the nigger. . . . A sneer from him, followed by a boast—an intoxicated statement very likely true—but a vile one. . . . And then, with a yell like a maddened beast, the other had his one hand curled about that great black throat and with his free one caught up his full glass and brought it crashing down on the negro's head so that the splinters cut his face and the beer choked and blinded him. A veritable tiger-cat, this fellow then! He stood snarling and spitting at the spluttering dark man:

“Come on, ye black son o’ Satan! I’ll learn ye—I’ll give ye drink t’ swallow. . . .”

It was exactly this that occurred as I finished my drink; the rest came swifter still as I was about to put the glass down. For the black had clutched at a table to save himself from a complete fall; and, clutched to what he found there and still clutching, threw himself on the other, screaming aloud with passion. While from all sides went up the most violent shouts:

“’E’s drawn a knife!” . . . “Look to yourself, matey!” . . . “Ketch ’old on ’m, can’t yer?” And then to die away to harsh and sullen murmurings of “Ah-h-h-h. . . .”

For the square, nimble-footed little man, sharp with his eye, easy with his hand, had unloosened that clasp-knife of his and brought it into play while the black still struggled with his drunkenness to get his feet steady. . . . Then they formed a ring about the two of them.

It was amazing! Utterly extraordinary! In that

one instant the whole place had changed. No noise! Only the soft padding of feet; stealthy and horrible in their movements. Not even any sign of excitement! Simply a circle of eagle-eyed, keen, and perfectly collected men, watching and muttering of one thing only—chance!

Of course there was Grainger! Rather like a mangy and hysterical crow, leaping and flapping and wailing around that dispassionate ring. All whimpers and shrieking panic. "Get 'em away, I say! Kep 'em off it, can't ye. Blast and damn yer all—you 'll git the law on me, the law I say! Git 'em apart, won't ye? Apart, I say. . . ." Then of a sudden his voice rose to one wild scream . . . "Jesus Christ! 'E's killed 'im! Killed 'im. . . ."

If there was any doubt at that gurgling, choking cry, followed by a heavy thud, there was certainly no mistaking the meaning of the thick triumphant voice that rang through the room:

"My girl! Mine, I tells ye! And by Go' I 'll knife any other rat who crosses 'er path or mine!"

Then some one asked, "What 's to be done wi' this?"

And Grainger's voice wailed on: "In my house, my house! Fiends, that 's what you be—bloody fiends!"

And they simply took no notice of him and began to talk violently among each other.

I turned to Andrew. He was standing on a chair staring straight at the triumphant sailor. At that instant the intensity of his look did not occur to me; later I remember it came back to me. I am inclined



to think that if the violence of this business was amazing, even more so was the behavior of the man. He stood like a conqueror. In all this din, among all this confusion, he seemed entirely unmoved, completely aloof. With the handkerchief from his head he proceeded carefully and methodically to wipe and clean his knife, to shut it with a click and fasten it to his belt; to measure—deliberately and thoughtfully—neat brandy into a glass, and drink it down, not at one violent gulp, but slowly and lovingly, as if he were the most fastidious epicurean, instead of another Cain, with the devil in his heart and blood on his hands.

He had committed murder. What of it? Something had crossed his path, had offended him and his love. Well! This was his answer. This was his way. You knew he would put up no defense. He was exactly the man who despised such a thought. It was unnecessary—it was more than that; it was blasphemy. It was a lie against his love—it was a sin against his principles. Oh, yes, principles! And you may fling the rope about his neck as your answer to them. Well, I grant you that will be the end of the body but not the spirit.

Ages back, terrific unknown ages, that spirit must have lived with its kind; hunted in packs as wolves do. Hunted and loved and killed, even as now it will suddenly rise up red-hot once again to hunt and love and kill! Civilization has nothing to do with it! It is too old a matter, too overcharged with all the passions of all the ages, to be got rid of. Once it must have been

written down—whether in sand or rock or tree, neither you nor I can tell. But it was then what it is now and always will be! A sign, a mark, a writing on the wall and the lettering exceedingly bloody.

And it was this little man, with the twist of a beard and the dangling knife, perfectly nonchalant, most perfectly at ease, who stood now symbolical of that law. So far as he was concerned the main business was finished! He stood aside; the final clearing up was a matter affecting his companions. And, from their point of view, principally affecting Grainger. They simply tackled on the unhappy man, and with threats and snarls screwed him this way and that.

“You ’ve got a back way out o’ this: spit it up, can’t you!”

“Open yourn mouth now! Open it up! By Gor’, will ye ha’ us to do it for ye?”

And at intervals Grainger’s persistent wail: “In my house, my house! Fair ruined me! Bloody fules, that you be! Bloody, *bloody* fules! My house!”

And then an answering shout from the enormous man with the enormous boots: “Who th’ burning hell cares o’ yourn blooming house? I’ll burn it down, break it up, an’ you along wi’ it—speak, out, can’t you? Move your coward jaw, will ye? ’Tis our skins as well as yourn. Be you thinkin’ we wants to gie ’em away?”

I said to Andrew: “Look here, we’d better take our chance and get out of this! There’s no reason to get mixed up.”

He was still standing on the chair staring at the man who had caused this violent upheaval. He never moved as he murmured, "How do you propose we go?"

I answered almost impatiently: "They have n't thought of bolting up yet. I think we could manage it."

He suddenly looked down at me and then he seemed different—changed. At that moment I could not make it out. Later. . . .

He got off the chair and replied: "I want to speak to that man! I must, before I leave here. . . ." And started to cross to him. He never did. Almost as he moved there came a hideous shriek from the unhealthy assistant, now pressing his face against the window:

"Gor' ha' mercy! There's lights and men all about th' harbor. We're done in right enough—done in."

And from the man in the pilot coat, very sharp and decisive in speech: "Hell on it! Rounding up, that's their job! By the Lord, we're bloody well trapped!"

As might have been expected, this perfectly calm review of the situation was followed by the most violent lamentations from Grainger. He spluttered out oath upon oath; he called upon heaven and hell and every single god and devil he could think of, and cursed and screamed and jibbered like an ape, until I thought he would fall in a fit on the floor.

He did n't! On the contrary, he was suddenly lifted clean off his feet and held by his neck at least a foot from the ground by the little tiger-cat man. It was he

who did the speaking now. Short-clipped sentences, every bit as short and clipped as the fellow himself.

"Watch here, matey! No slithering. Stretch yourn ears an' do some hearing. I've got to get clear o' this—so 's this lump of black rottenness. There be no more time for squealing—there be too much lost by it! Hark ye! I gie you your choice—a knife in your ribs or you spit out this quiet way o' yourn! Got me, hey? Which of 'em?" He lowered him so that his feet touched the floor, but kept his hold and repeated: "Which o' them? Shall you speak up? Nod your head if so.

Such a thing with those hands holding him like a vise seemed hardly possible. Yet in certain moments and places all things are possible. This was one of them. Grainger nodded.

Some one had fixed the bar across the door and shot the bolts; some one else had caught the rusty lamp and trampled it out with hands and feet. In the small space behind the bar a knot of them hustled Grainger and heaved and wrestled with casks and cases. . . .

"Move away this barrel! Shove, damn yer, shove. . . ."

"Gie us a hand wi' this. . . ."

"You take th' head then. . . ."

"That 's it! Lift, can't thee, lift. . . ."

If there was noise enough in the place it was equaled now from the outside. They were battering at the door—kicking and beating against it, shouting and bawling. . . .

"Open up, open up! In the name of the law. . . . Open, will you—open. . . ."

And then it was that the most dramatic, most fearful thing happened. It was exactly as if the being of Drama or Tragedy or both, suffering from lack of excitement and overmuch boredom, rubbed her eyes and yawned and gave a pettish poke at yet another of her puppets, and this time it was the red-coated marine. And he finished the trick nicely for her.

This sprawling soldier quite suddenly became drunkenly sober. He chose this moment for one of his short wakings. He had no knowledge what had happened; this thick fuddled brain neither saw nor understood the desperate happenings in the room. . . . But he *heard*. Across his heavy muddled wits came distinct sounds. . . . Some one trying to come in, some one crying, "Open, open." Well, why not? Was it a game? . . . A dirty game! Why do a man out of his glass? Rotten trick! Rotten crowd! It did n't matter the dimness of the room; he could n't have seen if it had been light. . . . He just heard the hammering at the door and made a dash for it. Fell, and lurched and clawed . . . and then, before any one had an idea he had moved even, had it opened with the shout of "Come 'long in, ri' in. It's a blasted shame t' kep yer from drink! Tha 's wha' they try t' do wi' me. But I show 'em—I show——" Then his wits gave out and he fell to the ground, and the rushing men coming into the place trampled on him as he sprawled. . . . They came in with lanterns, held on high, some eight



or nine of them—coast-guards among them. They rushed in crying, "What 's afoot here?" And one, his light on high: "Blood on the floor. . . . Murder done. . . . Shut that door! Shut it sharp! . . ." But they had reckoned without the little tiger-man.

You see his position? You realize its grimness? He was up against it. He was trapped. The way at the back was narrow, and most securely blocked by those carrying the negro. The front way . . . it was his only chance, and he took it. He was like a spitting cat, and he fought like one. He sprang to the high mantel-shelf and caught the two torches from their place—one in each hand—and he used them as weapons. Right and left he struck, right and left, and hard and furiously. That knot of men at the door fell back before him dazzled, scorched, blinded, swearing . . . he fairly plunged his way, blazing his path . . . out to the road, out—— There was a man there on horseback, the chief constable. Questioning, peering, directing. . . . And the tiger-man had reckoned on anything but a horse. He brandished his weapons and fought with them too well; he butted clean into the beast, and that creature, rearing with unexpected pain, used his hoofs, used his teeth, unseated his rider, and knocked the fighter straight on his back, where he lay silent, inert, game for no more. . . .

In the confusion that followed—the fighting and struggling and wrestling all about and around and within the door—Andrew and I and a good few others got clean away and raced up the village street. It was



pure excitement that made us race so. There was no sound or sight of any pursuers, and if there had been it would have been of very little consequence to any of us. They knew pretty well who had done the murder; Grainger had taken great care to inform them. Immediately they came in his voice could be heard bleating above the din. Thus there was nothing very alarming in giving a name and address. But the whole atmosphere seemed charged to the very pitch, overflowing, and seething in a perfect whirlpool of disquiet. Even I felt that, as I sped along. . . . Even I! Given somewhat to baldness and gout!

Nevertheless, I was glad enough when we came to my gate, and I fairly panted at Andrew: "Good Lord, I never thought I could foot it like that! I'm fairly dead, Andrew; come in for a drink before you go on."

He did n't look at me. His head was turned away, tilted upward to where the stars flamed and flared and danced. And when he spoke his voice was thick—thick like a man near choking. He muttered:

"Not now, Penrose, not now. I can't stay—I dare n't! Let me go. Let me go. . . . Ah, Christ! How much time I may have already lost."

He utterly bewildered me. He spoke in a new voice; he used new words. I put out a hand and caught his arm.

"What's the matter, boy? What is it? Come in and talk awhile; it'll do you good."

He cried with extraordinary passion, "It'll do me

wrong—do me wrong!” And as, for a brief instant, I saw his face, so I realized, with a start, what I had already observed in the inn; it had changed—it was amazingly different. Just as if some huge hand had passed over his face and smeared it with numberless signs—had left it older, hungry, desolate, even fearful. “Let me go, Penrose, let me go! I have so much to catch up with; so much to do this night; so much I have left undone! You cannot understand! While I, for my part, have understood so little. . . . So very, very little!” He broke away from me and crossed the road to a gate which led directly over the fields and so on to the Wold. . . .

I watched him for a long time; running, stumbling over the broken ground . . . until the stars, and the blackness of the night, closing down, smothered him entirely into their embrace. . . .

With the morning came the news of old Swinsco's death.



## BOOK TWO



## CHAPTER I

### I

**I**T was rather a foolish youth, bringing a note to the rector, who took the opportunity to startle the village in his own bald-headed manner.

“The old man had been taken suddenly ill. He had ridden for the doctor; no, not Mr. Ayerst, he and the missus had stayed with the governor. Oh, yes, he got the doctor right ’nuff. No! Mr. Andrew was not there. He ’d gone out late last evening—did n’t get back till near five in the morning. Oh, yes, the old man was dead by then, an’ the doctor been and gone. No, he did n’t know for certain *how*—something to do with the head. How did he know that much? ’Cause when he was waiting for the note he heard Mr. Andrew a-asking of Mr. Ayerst. No, they did n’t seem so very upset. Missus anyway, in a fine old tear and Mr. Ayerst humming away to hisself. Mr. Andrew? Gone to the fields. Looked all funny-like. What did he mean by that? Well, it ’s plain enough said surely? Looked as if he saw no one. Nearly run over him hisself—he did—a-galloping old Ginger down the hill. How for? Why, darn the man, a-cause he was walking bang in the middle and did n’t hear! No, nor



did n't move when he shouted. Just went on a striding like as he 'd never seen a man stride afore—as if he 'd take ditches an' dike an' all nor never stop. Like a dead man a-walking. How did he know dead men walked? Oh, be derved for a simpleton, *he did n't*. But he 'd reckon they was dumb and deaf, an' Mr. Andrew he were all that and going like a dead thing. . . .”

There you are, you see! Quite neatly put by the foolish youth, and most significant of all, his almost remarkable summing up of Andrew: “Like a dead man!” For I tell you if Swinsco died in the body—the spirit, if you will—something snapped and passed out of Andrew also from that day—from that day until I sometimes thought eternity itself would come rather than its return!

If I have spoken of a curious change about him that night at the inn, of a mood that was strange to me when he broke away over the Wold that night, I tell you it was as nothing compared to the strange, inscrutable figure that I met the very next day, and knew in a kind of dream as Andrew.

I expected some sort of difference; I knew how great his affection had been for the old man; and I knew that the years must pass and pass again before he would ever cease to remember. I knew that—and somehow or other thought I should understand his feelings.

Then, when he came to my cottage and I started forward to meet him, the few words framed ready on my lips died away into confused mutterings. I recog-

nized I was speaking to him—seeing him through some dim obscure mist. I was meeting with some one who moved and spoke in a dead, far-off fashion. I don't think for one instant he noticed anything. He said very little about old Swinsco's death, told me the date of the funeral and the various business that had been arranged. Of his own feelings and plans—very little. Of where he had spent that last night—nothing at all.

Then it was that some accursed grain of curiosity made me put that very question to him, and I remember even as I asked I would have given anything not to hear his answer! For, you see, even before he replied, I saw the lie slipping out. . . . He had been tramping the Wold all the night. That was all. Yet I knew there was something he would not tell—could not! not even to me, his friend. Then when I watched him later turn down the street muffled close in obscurity, I hated myself for the sudden wrench there had been at my heart! Who was I to sit down and wail my petty lamentations to the skies? Who was I—and in God's name what sort of a friend? Rather let me put an iron band around my feelings and wait my time in patience for the old Andrew to be reborn.

## 2

They pitched earth upon old Swinsco in Ditchling Churchyard, in the same grave with his wife and child. They took him there in an old wagon, drawn by four horses. Wise and trusted servants these, rendering

patient homage to their master, as possibly certain parents of theirs had drawn that mistress; so now the children played their quiet part in that great reunion.

That was his end, then. That was his way of passing. And the final finish, the arrival of some dusty individual with chisel and hammer to chip beneath the words:

ANN

BELOVED WIFE OF REUBEN SWINSCO

In her twenty-first year.

Also their infant son. . . .

Simply

REUBEN SWINSCO. Aged sixty-seven.

A long wait, eh? A great span of time before she reached down to him. Bleak enough and even frightening that interval! But who can gainsay the triumph at the end?

3

I do not know to this day why I was asked to return to the farm for the reading of the will. I cannot think I was eager to go, and I am pretty certain Andrew never pressed me; in fact, I do not think he ever made any allusion to it. It was young Ayerst who suggested it. Young Ayerst—even more the toe-trickster than ever, looking paler and longer and seeming to consist principally of crape and braid.

So I went. Crushing myself into the carriage that

consisted of Ayerst, Miss Swinsco, and one Bounderby, the solicitor, and smelling vilely of black kid gloves and creaking boot leather. Andrew walked; and as the horses plodded and he took to the fields, we arrived pretty nearly together, for which I was entirely grateful, for what with the complete silence of Miss Swinsco and the gentle murmuring of Ayerst, together with certain mournful ejaculations from the Bounderby man, my patience became jangled beyond words.

I can't say I felt very much better when we were arranged about the table in the parlor. I did n't like the almost sinister atmosphere about Ayerst and Miss Swinsco, and I simply could not stand Bounderby. I suppose all solicitors have shiny black bags and I suppose at such a time these bags swell to the most terrific importance. I believe, so far as that goes, their possessors become equally swollen. Mr. Bounderby was not a big man; on the contrary, he was rather small and drooping: but immediately he produced that bag and placed it and himself at the head of the table, he positively appeared to puff out with pride and personal pomposity.

There was nothing remarkable about him; at the first glance he appeared to be all mustache and no lower part to his face at all. It was only when you heard his voice and noticed that gigantic, ungainly haystack move, you became assured he had a mouth at all. I began to wonder how it was possible for him to speak and his listeners to understand; yet sound did

come from behind that straggling mass: and he started off with many allusions to "this sad moment," "my old client and friend," "the face we miss"; and continued in this strain of lamentation for quite half an hour—I admit the exaggeration, I suppose it was ten minutes! He paused to untwine the haystack and then made certain mention of the strange coincidence of the death, also, only a few days before, of "my dear and valued friend and partner, William Tegg."

"That—er—very morning my deceased and valued partner had been closeted with—er—my deceased friend and client on business. Business that we, hum, ha, must reluctantly admit we do not know the—er—gist of, and it is certain—I regret to state—er—certain we shall now never—ah, that is, never now know. As I am sure my friend and I hope—er—I may say client, Mr. Ayerst; I ask pardon, I should say Mr. Swinsco, already knows, our legal work is not only confined to this neighborhood. We have much—I may—er—say extensive affairs in the great metropolis, and it was the—er—call of duty; I repeat duty that took my—er—deceased and valued partner there that very day, immediately after his visit here." I fancy at this point the mustache tripped him violently. His voice seemed to disappear into space, and when it did once again make itself fairly clear, it was with the following somewhat bald statement: "The—er—calamity that befell him on his arrival in the city, therefore, gave him no time; such, if I may be so bold as to say so—such—er—are the ways of the Almighty—time—er—to communicate

with me his business that morning with our deceased and valued client. Neither among his papers could any such notice be found.

"I have also questioned this—er—good lady"—here the haystack inclined toward Miss Swinsco, who replied rather as a mechanical doll would jerk its wooden head. "And—er—she assures me no one was called upon for any such important matter as *witnessing*. Therefore, as is natural, we must assume, that nothing of any importance—in fact I think I may use the word of no *consequence* whatever was enacted between my deceased partner and our late and highly revered client, Mr. Swinsco. I think—er—we may assume that?" The haystack inclined this time to Ayerst, on whose thin lips there came a very pale smile and the murmured agreement.

"As you think best, Mr. Bounderby; as you think best."

This finished the speechifying, and with much bustle and racket he commenced upon the reading of the will. I remember at that particular instant there rushed, busy and hot, into the room, a bee—a perfectly huge chap who, after a swirl about the room, settled discontentedly at the window to hum and drone and generally let fly all his thoughts and feelings. I remember also, as I listened, how uncommonly like that droning bee the voice which moaned from beneath the haystack was. There were the usual preliminaries, of course.

"I, Reuben Swinsco, do hereby swear and declare,



etc., etc. . . .” and all the usual lawyer’s stuff; then, in the same old dull way, we drifted into business. “I leave and bequeath to my dearly loved adopted son, Ayerst, all my estate and the issue thereof. . . .” The droning tones went on with the usual explanatory clauses as to the estate. So many acres of ground in this part, in that part—so many cottages, so much cattle. . . . It seemed insufferably hot, and I turned idle eyes toward the bee panting about the glass, murmuring and muttering, now on a lazier note: I believe my lids twitched the slightest; it was an afternoon for sleep. Then, as almost from a distance, I heard the monotonous voice mumbling along. . . . “Also all mortgage there may be upon the estate known as Coltons, in the village Colt-Harrow, property of Lieutenant Carey, late royal navy. . . .” There came a sudden interruption from Andrew; he got abruptly to his feet and, crossing to the muttering bee, caught it in the one hand and thrust it out into the garden; neither did he move when Bounderby cleared his throat angrily and noisily, but remained standing there staring into the garden. For my part, I was so utterly astonished at this announcement that I missed entirely the greater part of the will until my ear was caught by the mention of Andrew’s name, and the moaning proceeded. . . . “The sum of five hundred pounds and fifty acres of whatever land my son may think right. . . .”

“With regard to this—er—legacy of land: a matter which rests in the hands of my esteemed—er—I trust I am not taking liberties when I use the word esteemed

*client. . . .*" His visage seemed to break up into one large crack which presumably took the place of a smile. He continued: "My esteemed client wishes me to state he considers he will be carrying out the wishes of his revered father, my—er—deceased client, by handing over freely, and indeed eagerly, the land—er—known as the Tilling land in the village of Ditchling. A most, if I may say so—er—generous decision on his part; some of this land being already cultivated, the rest—er—most fertile and newly drained, while the position is admirable." He stopped to fix frowning eyes on Andrew's back. I am inclined to think it was from this quarter he looked for polite and appropriate murmurs with which he could bring his own speechifying to a highly proper end. Unfortunately for him there came no sound or movement from Andrew, with the result that Bounderby was left suddenly and abruptly at a loose end, while the carefully polished remarks he had kept so hopefully up his sleeve to let loose at the correct time, simply stuttered forth now, a mass of "humming and hawing," ending abruptly in pure nothingness!

"Ah, hum—er—that is to say, most generous offer. Ah, I think then our task is at an end. . . ." He threw a bitter and appealing glance at the very unyielding back in the window, and continuing his mumblings of, "Oh, yes, hum, ha . . . at an end!" and sat down the very figure of discontented law.

Precisely as he did so the mechanical wires that worked Miss Swinsco shot her violently to her feet.

She fixed him with her bead-like expression and in a manner that strove to be gracious and savored somewhat of the humorous—was indeed humorous on account of its grinding note and hard sentences, and told him:

“There is wine in the other room. You must need it, I’m sure.”

In her way that woman was too much even for old Bounderby. He followed her—rather like a startled sheep, and indeed it was in the fashion of such an animal she edged him from the room, while he made unintelligible bleating noises into the haystack.

## 4

We three then were left alone: Andrew, Ayerst, and myself. And about us and about that room there crept and swelled a most extraordinary stillness. I had nearly said “frightful.” Frightful stillness. And I am not even now certain that that is not the better word. Frightful. . . .

And then, quite suddenly, the whole atmosphere cleared—broke away and was gone, and I was listening to the very gentle voice of Ayerst.

“Well, old fellow, I suppose this is good-by; will you stay with us to supper?”

I remember feeling for my pipe, because I know that in certain moods the very touch of it beneath my fingers comes as a remarkable relief. I wanted at that moment to say a good deal to Ayerst—yet I knew my job was outside the circle. Andrew’s the business that

went on within. So I caught hold of my friend, empty though it was, and dug my teeth hard upon its stem, and then sat and waited. I looked at Ayerst. Tilting slightly as he sat in his chair, eyes half closed, lips half opened—lips that mocked, twitching the slightest eyes that answered their mocking. . . .

When I looked away I saw that Andrew had turned as he stood, and was now facing into the room. All he could see of Ayerst was the back of that highly polished gleaming head. He said, and there was something very like steel against steel in the tone of his voice:

“Are you going to foreclose that mortgage, Ayerst?”

There was not a shade of expression about that very pale face. He might have heard or he might have been deaf for all you could tell of his feelings from it. It was obvious he heard: he murmured very softly:

“Dear old fellow, what mortgage?”

“You know well enough—Coltons.”

Neither the name nor the questioning seemed to have any effect, the voice was as smooth as ever as he answered:

“I simply don’t know, dear old boy—I simply could n’t say.”

I saw Andrew move the slightest—by that movement he might have advanced a little toward Ayerst: in the changing shadows of the room it was difficult to see. He said deliberately:

“That means you intend to——?”

This time the colorless eyes showed very wide for

the fraction of a second and then shaded themselves beneath their pallid lids.

He said, very softly, "It means nothing, my dear Andrew—as yet!"

Through the shadows Andrew's two hands suddenly went out toward that glossy head and then, as if with a tremendous effort, jerked themselves back to hold and clutch the one at the other as if each would fight with each and keep a check on their passion. He said thickly:

"Your father, Ayerst! Your father. Are you going to smash all his ideals, because you've nailed him down in his coffin?"

Ayerst seemed quite to cheer up at that remark. For once he opened his eyes and kept them open, wagging a long finger at no one in particular and speaking quite brightly:

"Ah, my dear old Andrew, that is just it! As you say, '*in his coffin*'. . . . And yet from the way you speak, upon my soul that's the very thing you *don't* seem to realize—that he *is* dead."

It was then that something very nearly approaching a cry of intense and most bitter agony went up from Andrew:

"O my God! that is just what I do realize!" He went on, racing his words on top of each other in a desperate, savage fashion, like some poor devil caught in a trap and sending out a last and hopeless plea!

"Ayerst! Listen, listen and answer me! What devil's game have you got on about this mortgage?"



What are you going to do? How are you going to act? Like your father or like—like yourself? And if you do, if you will, what will you say to those two—what will you say to Miss Carey? Answer me, man, answer me!”

There was a most attentive expression about Ayerst. For once he was a listening man; for once he was weighing word against word, thought against thought. When he answered, his voice was the softest and most contented thing I’ve ever heard. He just murmured:

“Why not call her Tarnia—dear old boy?”

If those hands had fought with one another before, there was no hesitation about them now. For a second they hovered above that sleek head, then with one terrific swoop they shot down and curled about that crafty neck. . . . And like a great saga I could hear Andrew shouting:

“Tarnia, Tarnia, Tarnia! And may God damn you to hell if you ever call her so!”

And at that moment—at that immediate instant!—I was back in the Smuggler’s Arms hearing that blood-stained little man shouting his victory to the roomful of men. . . . “Mine, I tells ye! Mine! . . . And he who comes atween her an’ me shall get what that black swine’s worth. . . .”

Through the dim shadows of that night to this day I heard Ayerst thick and guttural:

“I’ve got you now, Andrew; I’ve fixed you now! Dead I’ve got you; alive and you’re mine. Both of you utterly. . . .”



Andrew had him so that his feet were lifted clean off the ground and stuck out like two long poles. I could see his face whiter than ever, staring up at Andrew's: I could see his long mouth twisted into one long grin, showing teeth pointed like a wildcat's.

His own fingers were catching at Andrew's, yet curiously enough not attempting to drag them away. I think he wanted to spit out his fury—not to spoil it by mere fighting. I think, further, his hatred was such as he would most willingly have been strangled then and there—that his mocking ghost might see his enemy's hanging body and jeer at it!

Andrew answered him: "Yes! You've cornered me; but, by God! I shall corner you in time! I shall be your watch-dog, Ayerst! I shall sit at the foot of the hills and see your goings and comings; I shall watch the Wolds and see your passings and your ways . . . your ways with her! And if you hurt her—Oh, by heaven, if you hurt her! Then I take my oath your blood and my blood shall make one ruddy stream of it together!" He released his hold with such violence that the chair crashed to the ground and Ayerst with it. "Together!" he repeated. . . . "You remember that—together!"

## 5

Ayerst, on the floor, was no pretty sight. He was, in fact, highly ridiculous and even grotesque. He lay there all a-sprawl; legs and arms heaped and hunched beneath him—on top of him. He made no attempt

to move, but lay there staring up at Andrew, and it was therefore the first time I saw him with eyes so wide open, and there was something horrible in their stare.

Then Andrew spoke, this time to me.

"Time we were going, Penrose; are you ready?"

I nodded—being for the moment fairly occupied with one eye on my flickering match, and the other on the now slowly rising Ayerst. Then the door opened and Miss Swinsco entered. She darted out instantly at Andrew:

"Your things are packed; the cart's waiting."

I find it almost impossible to record her intense air of triumph as she made this announcement. But you knew, as each syllable fell from her round mouth, she had waited her time to make it: this was her heyday, if any was! Then she noticed Ayerst and her manner changed. She said, "Ayerst! Why, Ayerst . . ." and looked around on the three of us—each one and separately; then she went on, "What's this? Whose doing?" And shot her breath out at Andrew to accuse. "Yours! Yours! And his father scarce cold in his grave!"

It was then Andrew spoke straight at her in his answer and his voice seemed hardly above a whisper.

"I suppose it was a pretty long wait for you until you could see him deep down underground! Are you satisfied now, I wonder! How I wonder!"

He went on in the same strained, tired voice:

"Now you're rid of me as well; that's good for you,

is n't it? Mighty good. You 'll know where to find me if you want me ever—these days there 's no knowing. I shall be on the Fens, waiting, waiting. . . . Like you—like Ayerst waited for this day. . . .”

We went out and left them standing there.

## 6

It was one of those still, warm evenings when we went down from Mellow Farm to Ditchling. Sun that was still hot casting shadows over the fields; no wind, no breeze, hardly, and above all no sound. We were the only trespassers into that intense quiet, the scrape of our feet on the dusty road the only noise. Right below—also shrouded in this perfect noiselessness—lay Ditchling. Scattered bits of color those cottages and their surroundings; not unlike a handful of scattered coins: brown with thatched roofs, yellow amid buttercups and gorse; silver where the dike cut about it.

It was at the foot of the hill, nearing Tilling Plain and in good sight of the big dike and the village, that Andrew stopped. He had n't spoken until then: all this time he had walked in silence and I with him. Now he paused to stare seaward. He said suddenly:

“I suppose it 's somewhere about twenty-five years since you dragged me in from that sea. Why did n't you let me stay there, eh, Penrose? Why did n't you let me be?”

He shocked me by his voice; but I had to remember this was the new Andrew speaking, and whatever happened I had to get accustomed to him. So I replied

grimly enough, "Because there are some things you can't do, and one of them is to make mock of human life and fling it on one side."

He looked at me with brooding eyes. "I should have been better had you left me alone: I have played a fool's game all these years. Such a game—blind, crazy game! And I lost. To such a gamester, what can you expect? Well, I was cheated: no man more than I!"

I asked him curiously: "By whom, Andrew?"

He said very simply: "Death! Death tricked me. . . ." And then with a sudden passion: "Tricked me all along, Penrose—played cheat with me from the beginning. Stole my very name and, because of the lark of the thing, let me keep my breath: let me keep it! What for; what, in God's name, for? I tell you so that it could step in again and cheat me again, and leave me living again! I . . . who am so comic a creature to be a comedy to all creation! I, who must go on living, living and losing! Living—having lost!"

I do not remember saying much to him; I do not think there was so very much that could be said. Later—I left him. Then, as I crossed the big dike, I turned to look back. He stood there still on the very edge of his land, head thrust a little forward, arms loose at his side, shoulders slightly hunched; but still staring across the marshes. As though from there he expected some message, as though from there would come relief. So I left him, wrapped about in his own obscurity—alone. Brooding . . . solitary.

## CHAPTER II

### I

**I** SUPPOSE I was then the most perplexed and disturbed man possible to imagine. Tormented with a thousand doubts and fears and utterly unable to see clearly all those things I so longed to. Here was this new Andrew—quite suddenly it would seem—born afresh on that night at the Smuggler's, and it was my job to accept him, my business to recognize him quietly without any questionings! Well, it was infernally hard, and yet I knew, however much it hurt, the pain was set far deeper in Andrew than in me. I knew that when I saw the agony of his passion with Ayerst not so very long ago; I knew that when I heard the grief in his voice as he called upon Tarnia; and I knew also that the pith of it all was between those two—Tarnia and Andrew! And, so far as I could see, was likely to remain secret for years and years to come!

And the curious part was that the more I tried to piece things together the greater was my confusion; and I know it was principally so because I kept on getting away from all the events of the last weeks and continually come back to Miss Swinsco. And at the

time that irritated me, because up to now I never thought of her as of much importance, abominable creature as she was. And that was rather odd, because, as events showed, she was the beginning and the end to the whole business.

I might have known it, for when you come to think it out there is something highly suspicious about the so-called Christian woman who uses her religion as an excuse and a reason for every single thing she does. You may be certain, had you asked her, there would have been some sanctified reasoning behind that triumphant ordering of Andrew from the house. That was one sure thing about Miss Swinsco; you could never catch her out!

I suppose the death of her brother gave her tremendous relief, opening as it obviously did endless possibilities to her religious thought and action. Yet this extraordinary woman in her extraordinary way *did* pray for his soul, *did* drape herself in black from head to foot. With the door locked, curtains drawn, she knelt at his bedside until the undertaker from Boston came over—knelt there and prayed her very breath away.

And so you see it was her eyes which looked down for the last time on that still face before they nailed him in, peering at him finally in all his serenity before they shrouded him close. . . . And yet words trickled through the village later on of much pious talk on the ways of Providence, and how this last "obstacle" was now removed from her way to the "holy church."



Now indeed could she live to be called Blessed. . . . But you will have enough of Miss Swinsco later on; for the moment I want to try and tell you all I can remember (and I do not think I have forgotten much) of a conversation I had with Tarnia.

## 2

She was waiting for me at my cottage when I got in. I imagine I was so heated with my own thoughts—in fact rather dazed—that I never saw the gray horse tethered outside, and when I walked into my room and saw her sitting there, I fairly gaped—unexpected and very pleasant! She got up from the window seat and came over to me.

“Are you very surprised to see me?” And gave me both her hands. “It was too hot in the garden and delightfully cool in here. I am afraid I simply lifted the latch and walked in!”

I held her hands; and it was after her friendly warm manner that she made no attempt to draw them away. There was something about those hands which gave you courage; when I felt them in mine I knew how badly I wanted it.

She said, “I had to see you—I wanted to speak to you.”

She drew gently away and went back to her seat. For the moment neither of us spoke—she, bending forward, stared into the garden—I, for my part, kept my eyes on her.

She asked, "Were you at Mellow Farm this afternoon?"

I said with an effort, "Yes; oh, yes, I was up there."

She went on quietly: "Was there a will? Did you hear it read?"

I answered dryly, "Yes, I heard the will!"

She moved so that her face came out of the shadow of the window, and I saw it was tense and drawn. She said:

"Is it good news or bad?"

It was curious, but I only thought of Andrew in that inquiry. When I think how much that will concerned her, how much it might mean, I am inclined to think there was something almost selfish in the way I forgot. I fancy I always forgot and thought only of Andrew.

I looked at her very steadily before I replied, but she made no attempt to turn away. She murmured hopelessly:

"It is bad, then?"

Something made me ask, "What would you consider bad? Are you with Andrew or against?"

She flushed faintly. "Don't you know me better? Must you ask that sort of question?"

I replied: "I don't think I know either of you! I used to believe I did Andrew. Well, that was a comical turn my fancy had! And now, seemingly, I have to wait until countless doors are opened—or perhaps shut! Not on me, but on this other Andrew, whom I do not know. . . ."

Her hands went to her face—tense, passionate hands with thin and most beautiful fingers. She whispered:

“I think doors are closing all around! Making captives of us—prisoners of a kind.”

I stared at her stupidly. And, because I could say nothing, I know, in desperation I began to make her some tea. She asked presently:

“Well, what did Andrew get?”

I clattered a cup, with unnecessary violence. “It doesn’t matter what he got compared to what Ayerst graciously gave!”

She said vaguely, “You ’ll break that cup!” And added, “So Ayerst had a say in it?”

I grunted back, “You couldn’t very well expect otherwise!”

She answered, “No, I suppose not.”

I went on, “Ayerst is like an old man of the sea: you ’ll always find him on some one’s back; or like a bad penny—turning up!” I poured boiling water on the tea-leaves until the pot brimmed over and splashed over into a regular puddle on the table as I shoved in the lid. Neither she nor I took any notice of this deluge. I looked at her, the hot kettle still in my hand, and the tea dripping now to the stone floor, and went on: “Like his kind he has luck; like his kind he slips through much that might be unpleasant and comes out the other side all spick and span, and no man can see the stains on him! He has given Tilling land to Andrew and as that dolt Bounderby has it, ‘a most generous gift!’ So it is, in his eyes,

and in the eyes of the village! But when you grow up with a man as you would with a brother, do you cart him out of your life with mud and slime? With that land he has to make such a beginning as Adam when God sent him out! Two years', less than two years' growth to a small part of it—the rest, a regular refuse heap left by the sea, added to by the dikes, part finished off by the village raggamuffins! He is to get his bread from that—to pitch his tent on those dung-heaps!"

She was staring as if fascinated at the thin trickle of tea dripping still from the edge of the pot to the table, and from thence to the ground. She whispered:

"How his father trusted him!"

In a most vehement manner I sloshed the tea in the cups.

"So may fools plant their faith!"

She looked at me then, and her eyes gleamed.

"Not fools, Mr. Penrose, not a fool! Rather a dreamer—a man of love and truth. Yet, I think, it is the most awful thing to let such things come into your life."

The intense note in her voice somewhat cooled my temper: mechanically I mopped away the stains. She asked:

"Was anything definite left him?"

I told her, and she continued in the same strain:

"My God, is he always to be tied to that land?"

Such passion was there in that cry that I stared up at her from my kneeling position with a very blank

and surprised expression. She hardly seemed to notice me and went on:

"I hate those marshes, just as I believe they hate me! Once—I thought there was some chance to get away. Now—chance has got us caught! caught! caught!"

Her fingers were pressing her temples as though she would dig right through in a helpless effort to seek words to help her with her frenzy!

"I think there must be a curse upon it, or did I bring that curse? It traps you about and has its own way—its own time to get rid of you! Tilling land! Oh, it might be a joke—it might be the most comical thing, to think of it as a *generous* gift! if it was not the greatest tragedy I think I have ever known!"

I said gruffly, for her desperation hurt me more than I cared to confess, "He will win through with it yet."

Her hand fell in a hopeless gesture to her side.

"Yes, oh, yes, I believe that. But it may be too late—far too late!"

### 3

After that she drank some tea (I can remember yet how filthy it was, though she never said so) and asked me questions about old Swinsco, and I told her all I knew. She spoke of him with extraordinary tenderness, and I gathered he had been uncommonly kind to her father. She mentioned him too—as "my little father," "my dear little father." But she never al-

luded to their early life. I recollect she said: "All this"—and she referred, you understand, to the death of the old man—"All this will make a difference to my father, and me. You know, Farmer Swinsco was remarkably kind to my father. I think he saw—what others have never seen—how much there was of the child adventurer in my little father's voyagings with land."

You see she never forgot he was a sailor. In everything she ever mentioned about their present life, she only saw it as you might see a very young, impetuous boy, sailing out on all kinds of expeditions. She said:

"You know it was all wrong, it was a mistake that we ever came here. My little father never saw that; he does n't see that even now. But he can't help it! People think of him sneeringly as 'old blood,' mean-dering and fussy: they are so wrong! It's young blood—very young, doing foolish things as all young creatures do! If they only knew, this talk of old age as childish is only to say something infinitely sweet."

"Young blood!" So she would let it pass as that. She would cover this father of hers with her gentle cloak of protectiveness. Curious, the change! Once that had been his way—his most splendid part. Now he stood at a distance—she to be his shield, his defense. "Young blood?" Well, well——

I was turning this over in my mind, when I caught her looking rather wistfully at me. She asked:

"You don't see that; you can't agree?"

I said uncomfortably: "That's a difficult question,



difficultly put. I am thinking of you all the time, my dear. I suppose I have n't your patience."

She asked suddenly, "In what light, I wonder, does my father stand to you—now?"

The truth was that until she had mentioned him—in fact until she put this question—I had not so very greatly troubled myself about the ex-lieutenant. You must remember all the time my thoughts were of Andrew. I was threshing out the meaning of the strange oldness—you will never know how old—of manner, of appearance even, that had so suddenly swooped down and closed in and about him. I was blundering around and trying to see reason; I was searching out this person and that. I had simply skimmed over her father! and now, even as she spoke, I was beginning to see things more clearly—too clearly! Her father! And in an instant all those figurings of mine faded away into space; I saw there was only left that foolish, fussy, crazy little man. Her father—with his finger on the vital spot, the one point—the mortgage and Ayerst!

I can remember now the sudden sharp stab of pain that simply jabbed into the very heart of me! I can see again Tarnia looking at me with eyes that even in that shadowed room seemed flooded like pools.

I tried very hard to get out of my chair. I remember muttering something about getting up. "I must get up—I will." But I could n't! I closed my eyes because I felt if I could shut out the light—if I could shut away that look of agony on her face—I might

think clearly and concisely and perhaps be of some help. I could only hear again and again Andrew's intense and passionate cry: "What will you do about that mortgage, Ayerst?" And the answering snarl that came back to him: "I've got you now—I've you fixed."

Foreclose that mortgage? And if he did? . . . Or would there be some way out? One way perhaps—one way.

With a tremendous effort I opened my eyes. I was alone. . . . She had slipped away.

## 4

I remember late that same night—over a last pipe at my bedroom window. I tried to think the thing out reasonably and even defiantly; I tried to think there was a mistake somewhere, and that it was not so bad after all. But the mistake was with me only; it was infernally bad. You can't escape such things as facts, and the whole matter smelled of them!

Fact No. 1 accounted for Tarnia and—most important of all—her father. That was bad enough, but Fact No. 2 was even worse. Fact No. 2 explained most correctly the head-over-heels method of that father's crass stupidity. It was this No. 2 which shot the ex-lieutenant a-sprawl in a perfect morass of borrowing and lending, debts, ruin, and finally plunged him straight into this mortgage. Fact No. 3 was the death of old Swinsco, and brought swiftly with it Fact No. 4, spelling out the dramatic entrance of Ayerst

with hands outspread for everything and anything that he could sweep into them.

Ayerst. And this world—this little world of mine made up of two people—must now revolve as he thought fit!

As he thought fit. . . . I leaned farther from the window and fairly sucked in the glory of the night. As he—as Ayerst thought!

Staring out into the beauty of that shadowed night. Seeing it, seeing that wonderful earth girt around with such mysterious stillness . . . content, gentle, sleeping. It seemed a most frightful thing that each morning it must wake to bring closer and closer still all the signs of such a catastrophe as it had been mine to see the edge of, only a few hours back! . . . When we rise up from sleep what things—what frightful things—rise up with us and confront us over again?

If there was no chance that Ayerst would hold his hand—well, how could there be even the grain of a chance that Tarnia would let that same hand overturn her father? Her eyes, her whole expression had told me more than any words! Had she been dragged all those miles for this? Had fate or life or chance brought her across that boundless sea to face this kind of end? She had followed those wildly careering heels of her father's with no sign or word of protest. She had slipped between him and scornful words time and again: was she to slip in once more—possibly finally, this time between him and a very hungry Ayerst?

What of her heart? What of the light that lay smoldering and shadowed behind her eyes? What of the passion that lay beneath her stillness? She could hide much; but she could not entirely make prisoner of that untamed spirit of hers! It was no easy captive: times there were surely when it must fret and pull on its chains; times there were when I could have sworn I had seen a glimpse of it! This flame that was Tarnia—the real Tarnia, the Tarnia born of that mother of hers. Was it possible that no wind had fanned that flame? Was it possible some other fire had not seen its gleam and flared on high with it?

And it was these wretched thoughts I eventually took to bed with me. While all the time I thought of Andrew out in that hut of his, master—magnificent master—of that barren ground. Beggared at the beginning, beggared to the very end. I had seen him so fresh and eager with life all these past years; was I to know him in the future solitary and desolate? One man's work, one man's way had made those years heap up about and around him until they lay heavier than the night upon his spirit. Possibly Tarnia had said aright when she had spoken so violently against the Fens. And yet she saw them all the time as disastrous to Andrew. In my troubled sleep they loomed up with greater, far greater, ill omen toward Tarnia herself. Like some vast place of sacrifice, and she laid out upon them a peace offering to Ayerst—a sanctuary against destitution for her father! A Garden of Gethsemane for Andrew.

## 5

Then as the days dragged on I began to wonder if all these thoughts were born of some vile nightmare. Things seemed to progress much as usual: and I would try and cheer myself a thousand times a day with hopes: it was surely impossible that beneath it all there could be such ominous rumblings?

I saw a lot of Andrew at that time; and pretty nearly every night we had supper together. In my way I was beginning to get accustomed to this new Andrew: this young-old man who smiled very seldom and laughed hardly at all. On whose face there was intense brooding, about whose mouth there were sudden sharp defined lines. I was beginning to get used to this new spirit. He had refused my suggestion that he should sleep at my cottage; he clung to the hut—the roughest of its kind, only erected for some emergency. He slept there with his dog, and I believe there were nights when the stars gave him covering . . . and even times when the two of them tramped the Fens for miles. All this you must see was a part of the existence of the new Andrew.

I think I have said to you once how deeply, how truly, 'he seemed to be one with Nature and all her ways. Now I tell you it was more so! As if, indeed, she had bent to him and he upraised to her! If she had wanted him; if she had seen in his strength and tenderness the shape of some son of hers; well, she had him now! No child gave itself so utterly



and entirely up as Andrew to this great Mother.

In those days he became almost a super-man. You never saw him away from that land of his; you never saw him idle. With the first sign of dawn he was up and out and fighting with the earth; with the last glimmer of light he was still bending, still wrestling, still striving! Like the old man before him he was sowing his seed; he was waiting to gather his sheaves.

## 6

"It was the hand of God!" he said to me once. "The hand of God that made the old governor start on those acres when he did! They're my salvation, Penrose, if you only knew it! With them I can start right off with my first harvest! It'll be the second with that ground—and not such a bad one! A bit of a thing, I grant you. But with any luck I'll make a mighty one some day!"

It was part barley and part oats. And I was along with him for that reaping; stood with him when we cut the first sheaf. He had willing enough helpers from the village to aid him, but no dancing or merry-making like there was up at Mellow Farm. It was a sober affair with good English ale to help it down. But up at Mellow Farm they made a regular feast of it with champagne, ordered from London by that splendid new master, Ayerst. Possibly in honor of his guests, Tarnia and her father! Oh, yes, and old camel-face Yardley and his daughter—you have n't forgotten her? Little Cathy——



## 7

Things were moving at Mellow Farm these days. Very bright and cheerful from the point of view of Miss Swinsco and Ayerst. Remarkably so in fact. You never saw Ayerst in farm dress now; he had got above that. He was all boots and neckties, all pomade and scent. He rode the countryside on a devil of a horse with his hat wonderfully cocked to the side—just as he would cock that glossy head—hat and all—in an attitude of amused interest when he passed Andrew pitting his strength against the strength of his land.

A glittering apparition this Ayerst! Apparition indeed—the very ghost of a gentleman. And I know I only wished he might have carried out all the rules and laws of specters and held that head beneath his arm instead of it being stuck fast and sound between his shoulders—a very beacon of dazzling contentment.

These days, too, Miss Swincso seemed positively to puff out with satisfaction and good living. To say simply she grew fatter does n't describe her! She increased like a balloon, each day, each week, each month: she expanded with amazing steadiness, until, I rather think, she gave up all idea of walking in case her legs refused to do the balancing, and she rolled her distance! Believe me, she was the oddest thing! If there had been even any visible joint between that suet head and body, it certainly became less and less. That bulging neck seemed to have sunk deeper and

deeper until the complete mass disappeared into, and at last did most surely become part of that massive trunk. She was a wonder, that woman—a sort of grotesque egg.

It was about five months after her brother's death she was received as a convert by the Roman Catholic church.

I remember that day with remarkable clearness. Not because of Miss Swinsco, but on account of another matter. A matter of even more importance than the outcome of her faith, yet both in their way having a most significant relation to this story.

I remember the day. Cold, with a persistent drizzle of fine rain, and a persistent sea wind, as well, which helped the wetness to cling to you. Nevertheless, I turned out and walked over the Fen land and up and across the Wold. I was now pretty solitary in my tramping; Andrew hardly left his land except on very rare occasions.

This time then I pushed through rain and wind until I was like a hot sponge, if you can accept such an illustration! Well, as I say, this humid—and somewhat out-of-temper—sponge eventually came to a halt at Colt-Harrow and found its way into the bit of a church there with an idea of rest as much as interest.

I might have sat there for the rest of the afternoon; for I confess there is nothing I so much love as these ancient village churches, full of old symbols of departed and unknown souls, and with such a perfect

quiet as I defy you to find elsewhere. I suppose it must be the hush of such a place, the prayers that are hidden within its very stones, that fill you in turn with such a hallowed peace and make you dream gentle, quiet things. . . . And so might I have continued my afternoon if I had n't been disturbed by an antiquated specimen of a sexton, who gave me the full play of his doddering tongue and, as he was deaf and toothless, his voice and my answered bawlings fairly made peace tuck her wings and hustle away.

Of course I left. There was nothing else for me to do; and I did it politely enough with a somewhat moody reference to the placid nature of both village and church. He understood this right enough and fairly beamed away.

"Oh, aye—oh, aye," he squeaked at my shoulder. "Oh, aye, it do be quiet fur certain; parson he ha' naught much to do but to kep hisself awake!" And the old ass tittered and twittered away until he made me positively hysterical.

He continued these jocular mumblings to the very door, and I know for one instant I had a sort of panic he intended to accompany me for the rest of my walk. When he clawed at my arm suddenly, and such pride was there in his voice that I had to stop again and listen.

"Ah, but I were forgetting, there be grand doings likely up here by and by; aye, rare doings fur certain."

I stared at him with a sudden dull suspicion growing in my heart.

"Doings! What doings?"

I don't think he noticed the sharpness of my question. He kept on in his doddering manner.

"Aye, fur sure. There be banns up in th' church this next Sunday fur the first time . . . now, let me se how many year aback was it afore th' last marriage . . ."

I asked savagely: "What marriage? What are you talking about?"

He blinked at me with a fine show of hurt.

"I likes that! Shouldn't I knows well enough what I be talking? Why, our young lady up at th' big house, Mr. Carey's daughter, an' young Mr. Swinsco over at Ditchling!"

## CHAPTER III

### I

THEY were married that November, and went immediately abroad. It was nearly three years before their return—before I again saw Tarnia.

No, I never went to their wedding. To this day I do not know if, when the morning came round, I might have put aside my bitterness and gone. The point was, it would have been for one last glimpse of Tarnia, and that at least I did have differently to my expectations; the night before she came herself to see me.

That evening brought with it a most terrific wind; no actual storm, but a tireless trumpeting thing bursting out as if it had been chained over-long, and was now most suddenly let loose. And I suppose it was that wind which shut away all other sound as I sat smoking and meditating at the fire. Because I know the door opened quite suddenly, and with a start I saw Tarnia standing there. We stared at each other—she and I—for some time. She stood with her back to the now closed door, wrapped about in furs, rather white, rather tired, her lips slightly apart, her eyes expressionless, mute—appealing. As I gaped

at her wonderingly, her hand slid from beneath the darkness of her cloak and up to the soft fur hat she wore pulled closely down on her head. She took it off and let it fall from her nervous fingers to the ground. It was an old action, that of hers. I think if there ever came a time when I might forget her face I could never forget that gesture. There was something about it—something boyish even, and so infinitely young and careless that made me catch my breath in such a way as to forget my voice. And I suppose it was the same thing happening to me now, for I remember speaking her name in a sort of vacant whisper—peering at her through the gloom.

She came forward a little then, and her hands suddenly went out to me and I remember how, with a sort of jerk, I caught my dancing senses and clasped at those imploring hands. Just in time, so it seemed, for with a suddenness that shocked me she had slipped to the ground—dropped to her knees still clutching at me, her shoulders shaking, her whole body quivering.

I knew she was crying and cursed my whole being for its inane uselessness. I could not even bend to help her—to touch that shaking form; she clung to me too firmly. I could only stand muttering unintelligible sounds, looking all the while at that bowed head and the faint show of white where her cloak slipped away from her shoulders.

I can never describe the awfulness of that soundless grief! Great God! it was a most frightful



thing, most utterly fearful because I knew the depth of that heart from which it had sprung.

When at last she raised her face to mine her eyes were closed, but from beneath the white lids great tears swelled out and trickled down her cheeks. She whispered—and I know I had to stoop to catch her meaning:

“Oh, be kind to me, be kind to me! . . .”

The very simplicity of those words stirred me profoundly. On her lips they betokened the most hopeless desolation; even her tears could not hurt me as much as that pitiful appeal.

I muttered: “How could I do otherwise? My dear, what can you imagine?”

And she went on in the same dead strain:

“I have imagined too much, I think. I cannot, I dare not think further.” Her hands slid out of mine, but she made no attempt to rise. She sat huddled on the floor still staring up at me. She whispered:

“I have been with Andrew—and yet I am to marry Ayerst to-morrow.”

I muttered in a dazed sort of manner: “Andrew! Andrew! . . .”

She opened her eyes very widely and stared straight up at me. “Would you rather it was Ayerst then?”

Not for one instant did her question shock me, but I know I felt a sudden dull meaningless rage, not against her in particular, but because I could not cope any longer with the mystery of the thing. I caught at

her two shoulders and my fingers slithered on the soft fur.

"Why are you telling me this? What does it mean—what are you doing to Andrew?"

I believe in groping for a firm grasp on that fur I must have held her with undue roughness. She never seemed to notice it; she breathed up at me in the same hopeless fashion.

"Nothing but love him, and I have no excuse for it! Did you never know?"

I stood back from her, and I'll swear at that instant you could have counted the pounding of my heart! I stammered:

"I had thought—I had hoped . . ."

She went on: "Do you think I am mad? Am I? Can you tell me?"

How I hated that wind! Mocking, persistent devil—drumming now on the window a most maddening tattoo! In a sudden fury I fairly plunged across the room and slammed the shutters together as if I expected to see hundreds of demon fingers, and hundreds of cackling faces mewling and mowling at the panes!

When I had crashed them together and turned again to the room she had risen to her feet and was huddled down in my big chair. The place seemed strangely dim that evening: too many shadows for my purpose; little pools of light from the candles and from the fire, but otherwise all shadows and even she a part of them. From where I stood I could only see the

pale outline of her face and her hands as they hung loosely between her knees. There was a most profound stillness about her then, and I know I wondered in a dreamy fashion if it were not possible that stillness might remain—I think I was frightened of words.

## 2

After all it was she who spoke first. She said: "It is because of Andrew I am here. Because I must tell you things you would never know otherwise—he would never tell you! And he will want you now more than he ever did. I am going away:—therefore it is different for me, possibly easier. But Andrew will be here; Andrew will live all his days here because the very sorrow of the place will keep him. . . . For me, I have no choice. Perhaps it is better for him I shall be gone, and yet I suppose I will come back one day! Who knows? . . . But it is to-morrow and the day after and the day after that! Those days—that time for Andrew! That is what I am thinking of; that is why I am here! Give me at last one grain of comfort to know you will be seeing him, understanding—cheering him on! Giving him what I can never give him now—courage! Courage! I was too weak a creature to give it to him in its fullness; how was it possible when I could not hold it for myself?"

A doubtful questioning note crept into her voice; she had turned a little toward me as if she expected some answer. I could think of nothing.

Then she suddenly cried with tremendous intensity:

"You will do this; you will promise?"

With a great effort I captured my tongue and forced it to retort, "What does it all mean—what have *you* promised?"

Instantly the eagerness died away. It may have been a trick of the shadows, but there seemed a look of something akin to horror darkening her face. She whispered back:

"Half my life! No, all. . . . And Andrew's."

I asked her then what appeared to me later a senseless enough question, for even in my heat I believe I knew the answer right enough.

"Why have you done this? What are you doing?"

She still whispered back at me through the shadows.

"Loving too much! Too much! . . ." And then for the moment stopped and slid the heavy cloak away from her shoulders as if it was weighing her down. She repeated doubtfully: "Too much!" And in an almost methodical reasoning manner she continued: "There is my father, and there is Andrew, and here am I between! Not belonging either to the one or the other, but standing midway!" She laughed suddenly, and in that still room her sudden toneless laughter jarred me violently. She muttered: "It might be funny, might n't it? Funny . . ." and her voice trailed away. When she spoke again it was in the same calm explanatory tones. She said:

"I could not see my father ruined; I could not see

him broken and turned adrift! You never knew my little father—you never saw him as I saw him—as I have but to close my eyes and see him again in those old days! Out there! My father! My poor little father! He was too romantic! You will never see it, but it is that very romance that has broken his life and mine! If you had seen him with my mother—if you had seen him with his men, you would have known he was the very symbol of romance! So it is here. He can't see any farther than that: he believes—he always will believe he is still adventuring in the old romantic way with his house, with his land. Oh, yes, even with me, his daughter. Every bit as he did those years back. So I suppose he will die romantic at heart—misunderstood—utterly misunderstanding.”

I cried with sudden passion: “And you ask me to believe that you—you the daughter of such a man, of such a mother—can smother the romance that is yours—that is you? Impossible! Impossible!”

She replied very quietly: “No. For that has been. It is over, it is done with—it has passed.” She went on: “There was no hope, none—not even at the very beginning. Yet there was one. That night on the Wold . . . with Andrew.”

She stopped and with an almost violent gesture covered her face with her hands. And I knew by the way her fingers dug desperately into her flesh that she was trying to blot out some vision—some dream—which suddenly came hurrying back to her in that frightening way that all dreams will. . . . I could



hear her mutter from between her tense fingers . . . "Never mind. Never mind." And they fell passive enough to her lap again. She continued: "Just one. When Andrew knew, when I had told him about this mortgage, what I guessed might follow, he went back to plead, to talk to Farmer Swinsco. You know what happened. . . . He was dead. . . . So that last hope vanished. Nothing really remained, for it was impossible that Andrew could support my father when he could hardly support himself. Neither could he and I leave this country and start again. . . . Journeying now is impossible for my father."

I demanded savagely: "Did you never tell your father? Does he know?"

She nodded. "Oh, yes, he knows. He does not understand; it simply dazed him—it completely shocked him, stupefied him. . . . Even as it stupefied me to see him suddenly so nearly shattered—to realize how little he could really bear from life and how easily it could be rid of him! How was it possible that I should be the cause of its entire undoing?"

With a suddenness that almost surprised me, she had risen to her feet, pulling the fur closely around her, and crossed over to me. She stood so very near that I could feel her warm breath; she stood very quietly, hardly moving. She asked—and her voice was a mere whisper:

"Now I have told you—now you know everything. How much do you despise me?—you are my judge!"

I could hardly answer her. The thing was too in-



tense—too frightful! She was asking me to judge her! She was putting me in a position to which I could lay no hold, because the agony was not mine, but hers, and I knew she would be her own judge—her own most ruthless arbitrator all the days of her life. I answered huskily:

“My dear, my dear, you make me feel very humble. . . .”

Her hands caught desperately at my coat; she cried with sudden vehemence: “Be good to Andrew, be kind to him; it is all I ask, all I beg of you! You are his friend—oh, for his sake—for my poor sake, let me know you will help him. Let me know you will be with him here. . . . Here, in all these days—these frightful days to come. Stay with him, be near to him! There is no one else—no one else. . . .”

I put my hands over hers and held them tightly. “I promise! My dear, I promise.”

I felt her fingers loosen beneath mine, and her dark head drooped forward listlessly. Very faintly came her sigh:

“Oh, my love, my dear, dear love! . . .”

### 3

There must be something very extraordinary about women. I know there was something very marvelous about Tarnia. It is a very easy matter to say of a woman, “She has suffered. She is suffering.” But it is a very different thing deliberately to put yourself in her place—to feel with her each thought, and

bear with her each pain! That is a state I fancy which is entirely out of one's reach! Sympathy, yes. . . . But the finest understanding is a mere speck of dust compared to the agony—the gnawing, desperate agony—that can rend the very heart clean out of one and split the soul across and across. . . . Even as when those myriads of years back the veil of the temple was rent and stripped, on Christ's cry of anguish to His God:

Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani. . . .

So Tarnia on her knees must have prayed—must have mourned. And this evening when she let me see, dimly as if through strands of vapor, through some faint mist, her heart in pieces, her soul in most frightful torment, I could but marvel at her composure. I could but stand amazed at the enduring courage, stoicism even, with which she faced this sorrow! I, who could but guess only in a kind of haphazard manner, because of the compassion I bore her, the frightfulness of her suffering—how utterly ghastly, beyond all speech, beyond all explanation, was her real pain—her most hideous despair! She was drinking such a cup then that she knew—knew with every sip she took—would never pass, could never pass! It was a drink, I verily believe, would have stifled some, but such as she was she held it ready to her lips, as if it had been purest wine, instead of stuff likely to scorch her very life. . . .

And it was this Tarnia—this Tarnia whom with one

jerk of the wrist Fate had turned into a woman heavy with sorrow; even so could now turn to me—gently, gravely, even as a child might turn—to say good-by. . . .

Very stiffly I slid my tongue between my dry lips in a most dejected effort to loose them. I heard a sort of crackling sound and realized it was my own voice muttering: "Not good-by; I shall see you again some day."

She was fastening the clasp at her throat, and kept her head lowered. "That can never be; this is the last time you will see me. . . . Some one else—some other day, that is possible. Not me—the real me, I shall be gone."

I knew to what she was alluding; I knew the truth of her words. It was a matter of burying, a business of making a shroud ready now and folding it about this Tarnia. She stretched both her hands out and repeated, "Good-by."

I think at that instant I was as blind as I am dumb. I know I could not speak, and I am sure I could not see very clearly. I had a dull recollection of clasping those hands and drawing them up to me: it was the climax of the whole affair. It was the very end. But she came a little nearer. She asked, very simply, very gently:

"Won't you kiss me? Not just my hands but as you would indeed have done had things been—different!"

She stood sideways to me, her head tilting back a

little. There was something in its free poise, such as you might expect with a child until you saw the gravity of her eyes and knew in a flash how much there was of the woman! It was, in fact, when you could look right down into their depths—as for one second I was looking—you realized how terrific a battle she must have fought. How great a storm must have passed within her! It did not matter how much those fine lids would shade them, that brooding flame that was Egypt—that Egypt of old, hot as its sand, free like its desert, laying claim in its wild way to her mother and certainly to her forebears—fronted you now from those wondrous pools of light. And yet there was the marvel that she could shadow it down close with infinite patience, that she could bind it secure and hold it prisoner. So I kissed her cheek—in farewell, in homage. . . .

She told me some conveyance was going up to Coltons that night from Yardleys. It was to wait for her; she would return by it. I intended at least to accompany her there, but she would not hear of it.

"I am quite safe," she insisted. "It is n't so dark that I cannot see; besides I have a light. I want to think of you here in this room—this room that for many reasons is very dear to me. Let me keep it fresh in my mind—think of you in it as Andrew will so often find you—come to you!"

So she left me. And the last view I had of her was the glimmer of light from her lantern held on high. A light that moved and swayed as the wind caught it

—that old jeering mocking wind which in its mischief-loving way had been the cause of Andrew's coming, and even now would insist on a further racket of merriment at Tarnia's going. And so with that for her trumpeter the night at last swallowed her finally from my sight.

## 4

And so it seemed as if these two—Andrew and Tarnia—were to be left with ghostly memories to keep them company for all their days to be. Gray, haunting wraiths, fashioning themselves as is their manner into all sorts of agonizing questions and thoughts: "might have been," "is not," and "can never be." A regular procession passing up and down, in and out, to and fro—lounging about, squatting around in that indolent frightful way that is their fashion. Phantoms, shadows, bubbles thrown out haphazard from blank and vanished dreams. There was nothing else left. When Tarnia went her way I rather imagine some troop of them trailed with her; so now Andrew, digging the soil, saw them with every shovelful he turned, watched them riding in the storm, or lazy in the sun, wailing with the rain or laughing in the wind. Pacing the room with him, twitching sleep from his eyes, and when the night would pass, prancing in again with the dawn—these shadowy things he had once thought so full of hope, these ghosts as he had once believed so radiant with life.

He walked the Fens very seldom now; his free time he spent chiefly with me. Talking very little



—certainly never of Tarnia. He wanted company, that was all. Apologetically he told me that once.

"I never talk much, do I? Can you put up with my silence? I ought to walk alone, I suppose; I don't know why I never do. . . . I believe I am frightened—frightened—frightened of my own footsteps."

Nights we would sit—he and I—summer in the garden, winter at my fire. Silently smoking, silently thinking. He had a dog, I remember. One of those big collies—short of tail, massive in strength, amazing in wisdom. He had reared him from a puppy, and I knew—as I imagine the village knew—when you saw the one there was certain to be the other. There was an extraordinary code of understanding between them, a link, a bond. Very full, very deep—and if I can see Andrew now with that big fellow—Gulliver, as he was named—solemn and contented at his heels, I think even more vividly do I remember those early autumn days when we three sat at my fire and I would be the one to drowse and nod and very possibly snore, only to wake with a start and see Andrew on the other side—pipe out, arms folded, brooding—staring into those flames and beyond; and Gulliver at his side as wakeful and staring as if he knew in the heart of that blaze some dream lay shadowed—neither would it ever come out; neither would he, in his eager, loving fashion, catch it and bring it—most priceless capture—to earth, to see again that beloved face smile. . . .



## 5

I have spoken before of old camel-faced Yardley? Corn chandler, wood merchant, and what not, holding some position in the local affairs at Boston. A smooth-faced man, rather long in the jaw and loose in the throat; yet such details are of little importance—the only essential thing to make note of is that Cathy was his daughter: now that is important.

Yardley, such as he was, ponderous, grossly aware of his own position, or rather the position he considered he belonged to, had little or no time to spare on any ordinary individual such as myself. Therefore, you can imagine my surprise when one morning he stopped me politely enough as I was passing his place with all the suggestions of a conversation. Very surprised, I can assure you, and not at all pleased. For any talk with him was the one thing I did dislike. You see, he was a whisperer of the worst type. I am not blaming the man, I don't suppose he could help it, but it became a positive pain to make any sense of the murmuring waves of sound that trickled up. I have never understood how any one had patience with him; I can only suppose they must have had a great deal more than I: at least I made no pretense in that direction.

So I confess when his bulk crossed my path and his bulging eyes fixed mine, I made weak attempts at excuses. He cut them short. He surveyed me

in his usual ponderous manner—one large hand caressing his chin—and asked in his husky way:

“Now, with regard to young Andrew Sartor, what would you say of him?”

Flabbergasting question this from a man who had no interest whatsoever in Andrew, or as far as I knew any person in the village! I stared up at him blinking.

“What the deuce——?”

He caressed that egg-shaped chin with even more tenderness.

“Nevertheless that is what I am asking. Do you consider that young man able, worthy, reliable?”

This tickled my sense of humor. I laughed only to ask amusedly: “Oh, come now, you know enough of Andrew yourself.”

He waggled his head doubtfully. “Much more depends on it than you can imagine.”

I began to wonder what the dickens he was driving at. I said impatiently: “Can’t you explain a bit more? What is it you want to know, and why?”

He suddenly took snuff with an unnecessary noise, and then sneezed with such violence that I jumped and glared angrily. He tapped the box with impressive fingers.

“I have my reason. Oh, yes, I have indeed! A father’s reason, and that is of supreme importance. This same young man, Andrew Sartor, has been around after my daughter: my girl Cathy, just back from visiting. That is the fact of the matter—the

exact fact, and you can't get away from it, either!"

He slipped the box into its correct place in his pocket, and producing a handkerchief blew a dignified note.

I could only stare at him, certain for the moment his confounded whisperings had reached my ears in a hopeless muddle. So I just laughed, threw back my head and chuckled to my heart's content. Cathy and Andrew——It was funny, infernally funny! I said:

"I say, I say! Have n't you been dreaming?"

He answered with a profound show of hurt: "I have *not*! On the contrary, the young man has only recently been speaking with me."

I spluttered; "This is very extraordinary!"

He wagged his head more than ever. "Most extraordinary! Just what I say, and unsatisfactory altogether."

He was talking Dutch so far as I was concerned, but the tone of his voice fairly nettled me. I snorted furiously: "Why, good God! man, what have *you* to say against him?"

He puffed out his stupid sagging lips. "I do not know; I am not sure. I am a father, and a father's position is a responsible one."

I said bitterly, "Well, I suppose you act up to it!"

He murmured: "I do my best—I always do my best, but Cathy is not easy to manage; she can be very trying—very much so: I have had a most distressing scene with her."

I stared hard at him. "Distressing? With Cathy? Do you mean about Andrew?"

He nodded, and went on gloomily, "Exactly. It seems, therefore, that I have no alternative; a father's lot is indeed full of perplexity."

There was something quite startling in this sudden fresh revelation of Cathy. I had put her down all along as a flirt, and here she was displaying qualities I never thought possible with her. I asked dully:

"What did Andrew say?"

"He was very frank; yes, indeed, most candid. He stated his position very clearly. I cannot think it is such as I would like for my girl, but he may rise to bigger things; I profoundly hope so."

I muttered: "You need n't be afraid of that. Andrew was made for big things; he will rise to them as he has always done when they come his way——" Then I stopped, I was saying too much.

Yardley did n't understand. I doubt if he listened. He continued to lament. "He seems to have started well enough. But it's all a risk—a very great risk for a father to stand by and watch and say nothing."

I burst out, "Then why, in heaven's name, have n't you said something?"

He looked extremely hurt.

"I'm afraid you don't seem to understand. I cannot see my child suffer. I am not like that!"

I snapped back at him: "The truth is that you're afraid of your daughter, and you know perfectly

well if you refused outright she'd very likely fool you somehow!"

He looked decidedly glum, but he took my temper mildly enough. "She is a dear child, but she is wilful. I fear she is sometimes painfully so. She will not listen to me: she is so sure that I suppose it must be as she says. But it is not what I wished: it is far from my hopes?"

I demanded, "What hopes?"

He told me dejectedly, "There was Ayerst Swinsco; now *that* would have been a marriage!"

If I had n't felt so confoundly angry at this comparison of Ayerst with Andrew, I think I could have almost consoled with him: as a fellow-dreamer in his way with me! Somehow or other I saw a link between the two of us. As it was I cried hotly:

"She's a million times better off with Andrew, I can tell you that!"

He looked at me as if I were a fool, and I suppose I was, judged by his ideas. He answered sadly: "If only that young man had been on better terms with Ayerst! He might have had something better than that waste of land."

I told him stiffly, "You had better speak to Andrew about that!"

He did n't seem to hear me. He said in a glum sort of way, "Still, there's Cathy——"

I asked, "Well, what of her?"

He made much display of smoothing his entire face with both hands. He throated: "She's strange.

Lately she's been in London. Seemingly it's upset her. She's excitable, is Cathy—full of fancies and then just as tired of them! How do I know this is n't just a fancy on her part?"

I had thought that all along, and I asked him irritably: "Well, what if it is? What do you propose doing—or Andrew?"

He sighed. "I don't like it. I don't like it! It's unexpected, sudden."

I said savagely, "Then why don't you stop it?"

He had thrust one finger into his mouth and stood there rather like an overgrown sulky child. He drew it out with a slow, sucking noise, staring at it as if he had been fishing and expected a catch, and whispered rather to it than me. "I suppose she's spoiled. And yet she's my daughter, and she'll not take no for an answer once she's got her mind fixed on something. She does n't see risks as I do. That's through being young; that's what it is."

I turned away disgusted and left him still staring at his finger with that ponderous, unsatisfied helpless expression that might mean anything, but far more likely meant nothing.

## 6

I went in search of Andrew, and found him making a pigsty. He waved his hand as I came up, and shouted a "Good morning," adding, as he continued hammering, "Don't mind me not stopping, will you? I've the dickens of a day to get through. I have n't



even the time to be polite; sit on that bucket if you can stay a bit."

I asked: "Like me to? Do you want to be alone?"

He jerked back, "Do I ever want that?"

I took him at his word and perched on the up-turned pail. He was measuring planks and sawing them to fit. He had extraordinary deft ways with his fingers, and in this there was not the fraction of a second lost in the fitting, shaping, and nailing. Beneath his hands every tool he used fairly sped about its job.

I said, because I could think of nothing else, "You'll swallow those nails!"

He grunted ungraciously, "Is that all you've got to say?"

I watched a blue pencil shoot down a length of white wood before I answered; then the tear of the saw gave me encouragement. I told him:

"I met Yardley as I came along."

The jagging teeth were cutting deeper into the timber; the sound had taken on a harsher note. He answered casually:

"What had you to say to each other?"

I went on, "He's coming to see you some time."

The plank fell apart and was up into position as he replied, "Was that all he told you?"

I muttered, "Not quite."

He said, "What else, I wonder?"

I answered, "I imagine you know well enough."

He said beneath his breath, "Possibly—possibly!"

He turned suddenly and stared up at me, his eyes very blue and gleaming beneath his thick dark brows. He asked softly :

"What manner of man do you think me, Penrose? How have you fixed me up in your mind, eh?" I was about to make some answer when he interrupted me: "I suppose somewhere—somewhere in that kindly heart of yours, you have me pigeonholed—you have me gently, generously put away! Well, I could n't do without your affection. And yet—— How much do you know me? How do you see—if ever—my moods and what, in God's name, if you did, would you say to them?"

I said bluntly, "Pretty much the same as I do to you in your every-day life!"

He got suddenly to his feet and came and stood beside me, peering down, his whole face very intent and grim.

"I have been trying to escape from myself: to get away from a part of me that had no business to exist! I have been crossing chasms to do that; never mind of what kind, remember just this; they were utterly terrific; they frightened me because they were so frightful in their meaning! Well, I am getting away from them; I am passing on. I have dug into myself and found some other hitherto unknown part. Well, I am going to build on it, Penrose; I am going to mold it and fashion it into some sort or kind of shape, and know it for myself: this husk, this body—this other self! It will eat and drink and work and

play. All these things it will do, and possibly do them quite well; and you will know it for me—you must acknowledge it as me. You are to forget—as I am forgetting—all those dark chasms and all that lies behind them! You must promise that, Penrose. You see, I shall want your help.”

I asked desperately: “And this new life——?”

“Does not know Tarnia, remembers her only as a part of that dead Andrew, whom we are to forget, whom we must not dare to remember. She made part of that dead Andrew, whom we are to forget, his soul, his brain, his life—became one with him as he with her. Now, she is gone, as he is gone—buried in silence interminable. And yet—there must be some movement in my home, some sound to break the stillness. The stillness—sometimes I think it will make me crazed—then my own maddening thoughts! Just to sit as I do in the evenings listening to the drip, drip, drip of the rain, or the branches of the trees tapping at the window, rustling—ever and ever rustling, as voices whisper! And all the time, in and out of the shadows there is Ayerst—grinning, leering, tantalizing. He flung out his arms in suddenly passionate fury. “Movement! I tell you I must have something to listen to that is alive—alive, not dead; do you hear me? Not dead as memories are! Think what you like, but Cathy is to be my refuge; I can be good to her. Ah, I swear, so good, and she, she has some faith in me, some trust. If you knew how humble that made me! If you knew how utterly grateful I am, Penrose! Penrose, I want a child, a son—my own son!”

## CHAPTER IV

### I

**I**T must have been about six months after their marriage that rumors leaked through the village of Miss Swinco's health. Mere gossip at first, then as the weeks passed to take on a more significant meaning, a more deadly truth. She was desperately ill; she was on her way to becoming bedridden—she might live a very short time, or she might linger indefinitely; she had dropsy.

I had better say straight off I never had a spark of sympathy for her. You may put me down as cold-blooded and hard-hearted—it is how you please; the fact remains, I certainly had no other feeling beyond a sort of curious interest than she who, to my mind anyway, had led such a grotesque existence, should finish it off with an equally grotesque end.

You may not approve of this somewhat unpleasant idea! I am sorry, I cannot help it; but on the other hand, you never knew Miss Swinsco, and you possibly cannot, therefore, ever understand how deep an antipathy I had to that hard, cold, calculating woman, to whom no kind of circumstances—no, I'll swear not

even the blare of the Last Trump—could ever, or would ever, make the slightest difference in her whole outlook. You could not view her with pity—you could not! Or if you insist, then I tell you the nearest approach to such a thing came from the village itself; came in the form of a morbid curiosity! Until now I doubt if any one had given her so much as a thought. She dwelt apart like an extraordinary idol. She hardly ever came near them, not even to attend their church—that, of course, had made a very wide gap. If they had had any feelings at all, it was one of suspicion—dislike, indifference. Now they became as bees round a honey-pot! They collected in groups catching at any passer-by who might have been near the farm; they panted to its very gate, and stared and gaped and muttered; they became full of alarms, discussions and excitements. I tell you they were in a fever of a way simply because this unfortunate woman showed gruesome resemblance to a pumpkin mounted on two marrows!

Death did n't so much matter: men and women fell ill, died, and were buried, that was the end of the thing; but I suppose there was some kind of fascination in this frightful and virtually unknown (to them, that is) disease of Miss Swinsco. This frightful happening to her; and they were as vultures croaking and pecking and fluttering, ready to swoop in at the last terrific moment and see the final setting to it all. Yet, when that time did come a great many months hence, I remember they became almost melancholy in their

distress: the thrill had passed all too soon, you see!

I kept out of it as much as I could, you may be sure; there were other things at that time to interest me. Andrew was just settling into the cottage Yardley had had built; settling into life with Cathy—demure, pretty, and full of importance, and still apparently enraptured with being a bride.

I think she was rather enjoying life; rather enjoying this grave steady man, rather proud of his constant attention, his protective ways and extraordinary gentleness. It was just that sudden gentle strain in so hot a nature that had always shone out as the finest part in Andrew, but now there was something almost surprising in this quiet show of patience with Cathy; she was not an easy little person, you may have guessed that—and he was quick and impatient in his moods. Yet I would observe him at times looking at her with grave reflective eyes as if puzzling out something, and as if that something was forever eluding him. Then he would start suddenly to life again as she reminded him supper was getting cold and chaffed him for his dreaminess.

## 2

Plenty to think about, I can assure you! And then one day even more than usual when, to my surprise, there came a messenger from Mellow Farm—from Miss Swinsco. An urgent demand to the effect that I go and see her that very evening.

I very nearly refused. To begin with, it was a



pretty long stretch to the farm, and I am bound to confess with her as my goal there was nothing very thrilling about it. To go on with, there never had been, and never would be, any love lost between us. It seemed ridiculous that she should want to see me so suddenly and with so much earnestness: I felt both puzzled and irritated—but nevertheless I went.

I was hot and grumbling by the time I reached the farm. I had hoped to have seen Andrew when I passed his place, but he did not seem in sight. Cathy was by the gate bonneted and all, looking remarkably pretty, but engrossed in her own thoughts. She nodded carelessly as I went by, and I am afraid I was too cross even to trouble to ask after Andrew. It didn't matter as it turned out, because he was the first person I saw as I went in at the drive.

I stared at him, decidedly out of breath by this time, and considerably surprised.

"Hullo! I thought you never came up here!"

He said, "Well, I don't, but neither do you for that matter."

I grunted back, "Miss Swinsco has some idea she wants to see me."

"To see you?" He turned to me perplexed. "Why, that's what she wanted of me."

I answered crossly: "Some whim of hers, I suppose. That hill was n't made for me, and she might have known it!"

He moved on: "Well, let's get it over. . . ."

## 3

Apart from Miss Swinsco herself, there was only one thing of any consequence in her room, and that was the bed. I think it was the most enormous affair I have ever seen. There was something even terrifying in its vast structure; it stood in the very center like a great barge. Its ungainly canopy supported on lumpyish posts fairly pressed up against the dingy ceiling; its dull red drapery confused with a multitude of mattresses, bolsters, blankets that heaped and spread all over its gigantic space.

In its way it was like its owner; in its attitude it remained a symbol of her attitude. Grim, heavy, forbidding; I suppose she had lain on it many nights, crouched by it many days. Between these two massive shapes there must have been a very pleasant understanding.

Huddled round as she was now, securely wadded in, she lay massive and inexorable; her face heavy and mottled, her eyes glittering and hungry. She said immediately, "Those two chairs—be sitting, please; I can see you better."

A sudden rustle startled me: from the shadows of the bed, in which she had been almost completely hidden, a black-robed nun, very gentle and silent, slipped by its head and appeared to vanish into a smaller room or annex beyond; I heard the click of a door.

Miss Swinsco, noticing this, muttered, "Sister Beatrice—she will not hear."

I perched awkwardly on the hard chair in the very little space that was allotted to it between the window and the bed. I glanced over at Andrew occupying a similar position at the other side of the door. He was staring at her perplexed, and exceedingly uncomfortable; he asked slowly:

"Do you want anything of me? Why have you sent for me in this way?"

Her eyes were fixed on his face. Pig's eyes; fixing him down like gimlet points, pricking and stabbing him through and through. She seemed to be holding her breath, for she let it out in a most violent spasm with the words: "It's cost me much: what it's cost me you'll never know——"

He leaned toward her perplexed. "Then why have me here? Why see me at all?"

For the moment she did not speak. Her two hands came silently from beneath the sheets to fold on her breast and held there a big ebony crucifix. I cannot explain why, but there seemed something distasteful, if not frightful, in those swollen fingers clutching that symbol. No humility, no devotion! But a sort of heavy self-satisfaction—a blatant security, in fact.

I pushed my chair a little away from the bed; its scraping seemed to rouse her to speak again. She whispered:

"Strange-like it may seem to you to come again; nothing as it is to me. . . . Nothing! Things have gone out of my reckoning, out of the Lord's! But

it strikes at me—it strikes me cruelly to tell all I must tell, to such as you!”

Andrew said gently: “But look here, why say anything at all? You and I—we’ve nothing to do with each other.”

She moved her head restlessly on her pillow.

“More than you think; more than I ever thought.” With suddenly sharpness, she demanded: “So you’re married! What fool’s trick was that?”

I saw the sudden color rise to his face. “That’s my business,” he told her quietly enough, “my affair!”

She said impatiently: “Quick like you always were! That’s the way of simpletons!”

He asked stiffly, “Is that all you have to say?”

Her eyes closed suddenly; she drew the crucifix closer. “You must wait—you must wait.”

The room was insufferably hot, for you must remember it was August, and an August afternoon in a bit of a room, closed in on every side by door and window, hanging sodden and fetid with that stale, heavy smell which always seems to cling about a sick-room, is no very pleasant thing. The atmosphere seemed to stick in my throat and clog my eyes. I know I longed to stretch a hand and shoot open the casement, and get rid of this deadly stagnant feel! Of course I could n’t! I mopped with my handkerchief and loosened my collar.

Miss Swinsco lay perfectly still, her eyes tightly shut, her lips slightly moving; even Andrew appeared

disinterested and silent. Then just as I felt I must do something, even if to jerk unceremoniously to my feet and get out of it all, those beady eyes uncovered and found their mark, this time full on me.

She said sharply, "See what she's doing. . . ."

I caught my fuddled wits and found my legs at the same time; in a tiptoeing way I slipped to the door to the other room, opened it, and peered in.

The nun was on her knees at a little statue of the Virgin, in front of which she had placed a bowl of flowers. Her mild face was upraised with extraordinary intensity and passion, her delicate fingers moved lightly on her rosary. There was something infinitely humble, extraordinarily faithful in that swathed figure. I felt a trespasser on holy ground; a spy sent on an errand of curiosity! A kind of blind fury took hold of me against Miss Swinsco and her hymn of humbug. I shut the door again gently and slid back to my seat. I imagine my temper was pretty strong at that moment, for I remember the tremendous control it took me to keep my tongue even civil. I said gruffly.

"You need n't be afraid; she has n't forgotten you!"

That seemed to fire her up. "Why should she? Why not for me as much as any other sinner?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to reply, "So you do own to your sins, eh?" Needless to say, I did n't. I could not swear what I said; I suppose I gave out some kind of insipid reply.

But she had me under fixed observation by now. She shrilled on, "You were always against me!"



I said mildly, "Well, you know I am rather fond of Andrew!"

There must have been something rather tactless in this remark of mine; if expressions count for anything she seemed to be on the very verge of some kind of paroxysm: she did not seem to be able to speak clearly even; she simply choked out:

"Sentiment! Sentiment! And you must needs fish him out of the sea for it! This softness—this mawkish talk of 'feelings'! Reuben: he was swallowed up by it—first with that wife, then with young Ayerst, and lastly with you! You!"

She paused for want of breath, and I am bound to say she needed it badly: she looked frightful. On that huge mottled face the nets of purple veins seemed suddenly pumped out to a bursting-point, and violent little rolls of perspiration too were trickling down from her forehead. But neither that nor her state seemed to disturb her. She forced words out, muffled and strained though they were. "You, you!" and became more gooseberry-eyed than ever as she pierced Andrew.

"Waif and outcast from the beginning: such as you were, so you should have been to the end; so Ayrest wished, so he planned! He bluffed you—you know how well. Now he thinks to put his smooth dodging ways against mine! He forgot. . . . He forgot I had no lick of sentiment! I tell you he's forgotten a lot, and it's time he remembered. That's for you to do; that's what I got you here for!"



Andrew was on his feet and close up to her pillow before she had finished. "What do I care how much he has forgotten? What in God's name is his memory to me? I'll remind him of nothing because there is only one thing worth reminding him of! Only one thing, and he knows I pray to live long enough to thrust it down his throat one day. Get some one else to do your messages, for my business with Ayerst is too big to touch on other things!"

She never moved her eyes from his face; she made no sign or movement: she was not one jot persuaded by this outburst. She said in her most waspish manner: "Boys' talk and boys' quarrels. No more and no less do you get from petticoats! And if I tell you this is of her as much as you—you'll but cock your brows and listen because of your sentiment! Are you to be fooled to your grave? This much learn: I'll be giving you some reason to yelp after Ayerst for!"

Andrew repeated heavily: "Reason? Can you find me a better one than my own?"

She retorted: "Have n't I said so? Does n't it stick like a knife into the very bowels of me to look on you even?"

## 4

She paused to turn the crucifix and tilt it slightly upward and to her so that she was peering directly at that patient face and hanging body.

She went on; "Feelings! Well, if others, why not

me? That's what Reuben forgot; he'd no thought but for his own ideas—he pushed me and mine to one side, and I was his sister. He's gone his way now, and so has Tegg; little whipper-snapper Tegg——”

Andrew struck in bewildered: “Tegg? Who on earth——”

She retorted crossly: “Have I to remind you all along the way? Tegg—get your mind back a bit: that day—that morning—months—ago—years by now; Tegg, he came over from Lincoln; you met him in the yard when he was going. Like you to forget! He could n't do enough for you—fondling and fussing; asking you here, asking you there; did n't it strike you odd? Did you see nothing! Tegg, who'd never given you one glance before, now to turn so, and be as flint to me and Ayerst? Had you peeled your eyes before, who knows the happenings? Tegg, then: what do you suppose he'd come about? How many times did he ever come over? Once possibly—twice maybe, when rents and the like were due, but that day was neither quarter nor half-year, not any particular time or season. That morning he came in answer to a special summons, and, as you know, went straight on to London and was killed in a cab accident—that was his finish. That, at least, you knew. You heard mumbling Bounderby say so; you heard him also explain there was no note or record left by Tegg of the business done that morning when he came over. . . . Neither *note nor record*: yet there was, and for all Bounderby's law he could n't find it.”

Andrew bent to her earnestly: "What, what——?"

For one instant she took her eyes from the Christ to glance at him; for a second only, then she had them riveted again.

"There was a will," she said. "That's what I knew, for I witnessed it; that's what Tegg knew, for he drew it up. The one kept over at Lincoln was to be destroyed when he got back. The other one——"

Andrew murmured, "Yes, yes——"

She said: "In my keeping. I took it the night Reuben died."

Andrew whispered: "You took it? You—but why?"

Quite suddenly her whole face seemed to swell out like a kind of monstrous balloon, the eyes dwindling until they seemed no bigger than tiny sparks, and reddish at that. She said thickly: "Because everything was for you, because your name was the only one mentioned; and I hated you, young Andrew! I hated you from the day I first set eyes on you; from the day I saw you like an obstacle between my Lord and me!"

5

In the silence that followed I could hear quite distinctly the faint clicking of the nun at prayer with her beads. I know involuntarily I covered my face, because at that moment it seemed I wanted to shut out all sound and sight. And I know even then I thought that funny, because there was nothing to hear,

because a thick kind of mist seemed to have come down between me and Miss Swinsco, Andrew, and that bed. . . . Then all of a sudden I could both hear and see. I could hear Andrew speaking in a voice that seemed to come from a very great distance and appeared to be shot out of him in gasps; through that distance also I could see something of an intense whiteness; in a dim way I recognized it as his face muffled about with dense shadows.

He was saying: "To—me—you—say—everything—was—left—to—me? What—is—it—you—mean? Why—don't—you—explain?"

And then things grew more distinct. I could quite clearly see the multitude of veins on Miss Swinsco's face. I could also hear easily the terrific force of her breathing, so that even the monster bed quivered beneath it. I observed also her sudden fury had passed; it was in her usual sullen manner that she answered:

"There is no more to explain. You had it all: lock, stock, and barrel; from the last born lamb to Coltons in the Wold!"

When at last Andrew answered, his voice cut me to the very quick. It was not a man speaking, but a desolate child sending out one lost forlorn appeal. "No, no! Not that—O my God! You don't mean Coltons? Say you don't; I beg of you to tell me that?"

I tell you I could not stand that tragic cry. I bawled at Miss Swinsco—sick or dying, what did I

care? Was n't this my son, my child, caught most villainously on the rack and twisted and torn by the red-hot screws that pinned him there? I tell you I fairly shouted at her:

"Tell him, can't you? Open your mouth, woman; open it out, I say!"

She snapped back: "What's more to be said? Was n't the place tied fast enough in this? It was all one; they went together as such." She went on in an oddly reminiscent strain: "Easy enough the whole thing, with him lying dead and you out—and likely to be out all that night. Easier still, maybe, if it had n't been for Ayerst!" She spoke his name with increased rancor. "No spunk in him, there is n't: only for nursing his respectable skin at some one else's expense! He'd have done me in that night; he'd have been ready with a mouthful of lies. He would n't ha' done it at all had he been alone! The slightest creak of a board, the squeaking of the mice, and he would let out with a squeal and a clatter as if Reuben himself had come to life and was clamping down the stairs. He got *me* on edge even, for we could n't find the thing, and every moment I expected the doctor'd be coming; we searched him in the end."

"Searched—searched! What—Farmer——" I broke in, dumfounded. "Who do you mean? Who did you search?"

She snapped in on my stammerings, and grunted scornfully.



"Reuben, of course; why, who else? And Ayerst twittering and shivering away in the passage until he made my fingers all thumbs. So I had to fly out sharp at him and fairly drag him in to help. Reuben was no small man, you see, and I could but move him, and it was under the mattress I wanted to look. Must have been luck itself we ever did the thing as we did. I have never seen a man so fearful as Ayerst then; he'd hardly touch the body, and when he did his hands were like the palsy, his face running with water, and he'd not stay to arrange the clothes, but was out of the room as though all the dead men in the world were after him! He was n't worth the trouble; I told him that. I'd tell him again."

She paused, grumbling and muttering silently to herself, oblivious for the moment of us, surging against Ayerst.

I asked, "Did you find it?"

She surveyed me moodily. "In the Bible; I might have known it and saved myself fuming over Ayerst."

Suddenly Andrew said: "What happened then? What did you do . . . ?"

She appeared puzzled: "Do? With what?"

Then, as it dawned on her, she remarked irritably: "Well, what should I do with such a thing? Not what Ayerst expected, you may be sure. Ayerst with all his artful ways could n't use 'em against me; what Ayerst thought, I took good care not to do. He thinks the will—ashes. I thought otherwise. I've kept it close, here!"



And she fumbled beneath her pillow and brought out a bit of paper; she hardly even glanced at it, but extended it to Andrew, and as he did not take it she let it drop on the bed-clothes. "That's it," she muttered. "That's it; that's it! You've to take it; it's yours."

He simply did not touch it. He did not move, but remained hunched up on his chair, his arms stretching down at its two sides, his body loose and sunken. He sat as I have seen old men sit, or old women, helpless aged figures depending on no strength for support, but shaken down in their sitting as if life had become too heavy for them and they would wish it gone to give them peace!

Old people! . . . Young Andrew!

He only stared at it as if he expected it to take on a human shape: to rise up and mock him for the very joke of it. When he answered there was positive wonderment in his voice.

"Why—why did you do this thing? What have I done to you—what was I ever likely to do?"

She retorted grimly: "What my brother did: stand between me and my Lord. I wanted land and money, plenty of both to give to my church—to leave in my name. You knew Reuben's ways—hard, bigoted ways as they were, up against the Lord, up against my prayers! Could I expect different from you—you? You—with your ideas and Reuben hot in your memory?" I thought she was off again on one of her tempests, but she only mumbled; "Not you, not you! Ayerst

was the likely one; Ayerst wanted Coltons! Ayerst with his sudden idea of lords and ladies; Ayerst with his lying promises and talk!"

Then the passion did catch her; her fingers coiled and clung to the cross until I thought she would snap it clean in half. She choked out: "God's curse on him! May the wrath of the Almighty smite him deep and down!" She gasped at Andrew, and I thought for the moment she was on the verge of some kind of seizure. . . . "You've got to do that! 'Tis out of my hands now; you for that—you to make him accursed and lie him low in the dust!"

Andrew stared back at her blankly; he only asked, "What made you keep this thing?"

She panted out: "Did you think I would trust him with it? Ayerst and his smooth face and his smooth ways?"

He did n't seem to hear her; his whole face was blank, expressionless. I thought of him then as that foolish farm-hand had said: "Like a dead man. . . ." I tell you, to all intents and purposes he sat there dead, lifeless.

He whispered to her: "What have you done; what frightful thing have you done? What frightful, frightful thing are you asking me?"

She did n't seem to understand; she croaked on: "He swore to me that all Mellow land was for me: no man made a bigger oath, nor yet a holier one, for I made him on the Bible; I made him by the cross. Then he sends me the deed, sends it to me on my

bed—on my dying bed; sends it as a joke, laughing the while in all his slyness! Mine while I live! That's what's been sealed—*while I live!* And then not a stick, not a stone am I to put on it *without his consent!* And once in my grave it is his again: his! Signed and sealed and drawn up: this oath he made—that artful, lying oath.”

I was hardly listening. I was watching Andrew, waiting for some movement, some sign of life, from that still figure. He was staring forward at her, and there was something painfully reminiscent of a dog's look in his face: dumbly beseeching with an air of expectancy. He asked tonelessly:

“Is that all? Have you finished?” And waited again as a dog would wait. She grunted back:

“More? What more could there be; 't is enough, I reckon.”

He got unsteadily to his feet, rattling the chair back to the wall. “Then I will go—there is nothing to stay for.”

She said shrilly: “Take this—take it!” And jerked the paper at him.

He had backed up against the door and stood there rather as a man, caught suddenly in some desperate trap, will stand for his last fight. His whole body was taut and stiffened to the last degree; but I could see that his fingers pressed at the panels—quivered the slightest. The paper lay again on the bed where she had let it fall, with a sort of winking air about its crumpledness, letting out little wriggling move-

ments as Miss Swinsco fidgeted with the sheets. It was this he was looking at; and again I had that thought . . . "Why, the thing might be alive and ready to spring, by his look!"

And there was some truth in it too, for as Miss Swinsco, with a sudden violent pull at the coverlet, sent it skimming to the floor, even as it fell Andrew had thrust out his hands, using them as a kind of shield—a very defense against some predestined attack. Thrust out most violently and then wrenched open the door and was gone.

## 6

I could hear his footsteps echoing farther and farther down the passage and then disappearing altogether; I could also hear Miss Swinsco squalling: "He's not taken it; he's forgotten! Go after him, can't you? Run with it—give it him; hurry, hurry!"

And she heaved and jerked on the bed until I thought she would fall out. I said roughly:

"Do you think I'm going to stop him now? Keep on reminding him? Give him peace for the while—give him a little ease!"

She glared at me: "You'll take it though; swear to me you'll take it him immediately!"

"I'm going to let him alone," I retorted. "I'm going to let him alone. You don't know what you've done, because there's no heart in you! You could never care either, because you don't know what car-

ing means! You call upon God. What when God calls upon you?"

I think I hit her there. I believe for the first time in her life she felt some fear; or was it merely most bitter indignation? I hope not; I think not. Sudden livid patches of white showed on her face; I know against that heavy colored flesh they appeared with startling clearness. She dug with her tongue against her teeth, forced it slowly between them again and again before she spoke.

She said thickly: "You tell me that—you?"

I laughed then; I couldn't help it. There was something positively funny in the way she hurled that final "you" at my head.

I was positively grinning as I told her: "Don't you think you've had your say? Isn't it time some one else got a word in?"

She seemed to have somewhat recovered herself; she retorted with her usual vigor, "Have you no shame for the words you use?"

"No more than you!" I returned viciously. "There's at least one tie between us."

She asked with sudden sharpness, "But you'll take that will to Andrew?"

I grunted an assent. And when I saw the triumphant gleam in her eyes I think I hated her more than ever! For she guessed—and was even positive—that out of sheer love for Andrew I might use the thing myself if he refused! And I knew the truth

of that, but just one thing more. How frightfully my hands were tied by that very love itself!

So I took the paper with the best possible grace and left the room. There was nothing else to be done or said with her: only with Andrew.



## CHAPTER V

### I

**Y**OU must imagine all the way back to the village me fingering that infernal bit of paper as it lay in my pocket, and thinking with a sort of furious joy, "If I had you now, Ayerst, I would march you to the village, and every man and every woman should know you for the infamous dog you are!"

And you must think of me even as it crunched and crackled beneath my touch, whispering despondently: "Yet I should but pass you by! Let you go without one word, because of Andrew and his trust in me! Let you go and wait—wait until Andrew moves—Andrew speaks!" And I remember standing still and crying aloud: "When will that be? How soon, how soon?" And a ragged number of rooks croaking and cawing near by seemed to give me my answer: "Never, never, never."

All the way down to the village I kept on staring over the fields, hoping to catch some glimpse of him. I went to his cottage, battered on the door, and peered in at the windows, wondering crossly where Cathy was, until I remembered there had been some idea of

her staying a night with the famous Boston relations on account of some wedding. I supposed this was the time; she had been probably on the outlook for the carrier's cart when I had passed her some hours before. I slammed away from it and then stood for a moment staring from the dike bridge. Such as my mood was then, I felt a sudden loathing against the quiet of the place, and you who know me and my love of peace can understand the strangeness of that feeling. It was the very stillness that jarred me harshly as I stood: I felt a sudden unexplainable yearning for some sound, some noise. . . .

Here, there seemed too much mist, too many shadows,—silent creeping things forever hovering over the marshes,—too much empty blank space stretching out mile upon mile, slushing monotonously out to the sea! And even that sea seemed one mighty hush; even the sluggish water, usually grumbling as it turned about the sluice-gates, stirred now whispering and easy. . . . Peace? Was the old monster guardian of the Fens sleeping? Lying still there, churning over memories of bygone days; and if memories, why not brooding afresh on things to come?

## 2

I have no particular recollection of the things I did when I got back to my own place; I only know my supper that night was of the most haphazard kind; a bit here and a drink there—sometimes in my garden peering down the lane, sometimes in the bedroom from

where I could scan pretty nearly the whole countryside. Waiting about, idling round, watching the shadows, in that placid gradual way of theirs, immerse into one vast darkened shape, seeing the sun vanish with surprising abruptness, leaving a long ruddy streak in its wake—for all the world like a gaping wound in a man's side, trailing the blood in great stains behind. . . . Night coming up; pressing out across the heaven in all its somber splendor, dragging behind it sleepy-eyed silver stars; so the day passed. . . .

For something better to do I set about lighting every candle in the room. The pewter candelabrum on the mantel-shelf—a great solid thing with twisted branches—and other single ones of Italian china, planted at odd corners about the room; each bearing tall colored candles, yellow, green, scarlet, and blue. I know I had some foolish idea they might be a kind of beacon to Andrew out on the marshes. Then I set the door wide open, and settled into a chair with my pipe to wait again. . . .

I kept on dozing and waking in that fretful, uneasy manner, twitching and shivering, though the night was hot enough. Once, I know a great white moth plunged me swearing to my feet, and I chased it out into the garden; one or two of the candles were guttering abominably, and I snuffed them dejected before settling down again and, I regret to say, slept this time soundly. . . . Later—much later—I did wake, this time wide-eyed and keen-eared. From the corner of the room, where a huge pitcher of water stood, there

came the sound of heavy sloshing, drinking; peering into the corner I saw it was a dog, Gulliver. He stood with heaving dusty sides gulping down the water so that it floundered over the brim to the floor, every now and then raised his great head and stood with it cocked to one side as if listening, then, even as I stared, he took one final mouthful, was out of the room and down the path, had leaped the gate, and was gone toward the marshes. In a lordly, hurricane way he had announced the approach of Andrew; this was to fetch him.

It was quite light then, that gentle soft light that is the dawn and floods the world with its mild caresses. There was something very wonderful in that faint flushing of the sky; delicate butterfly wings fluttering their tranquil beauty where once the stars had lazed. . . .

The candles had burnt well down into their sockets; there was not much left of them but spluttering grease: I went from one to the other and pressed them out; in the back kitchen I heaped the sticks ready and set about with a fire for the kettle; just as they blazed well up, Andrew came in.

## 3

He leaned against the doorway, and I, from the other side, stared across at him. And the only sound between us was the lapping of the dog again at the jug and the fainter crackling of the sticks. And I know I thought, "Is this Andrew?" And I know

I wondered, "Good God! What can I say to him . . . ?"

He did not so much strike you as a man who had passed through some catastrophe, but rather as one who had spent torturous hours seeking for that which had deliberately avoided him; and yet—and there was the trickery of it—somewhere, somehow, it had ensnared him and pounded ruthlessly on his face that hunted, fugitive expression. All the brown of that face seemed to have been swept clean away; it showed no more in that early light than a ghostly gray, with staring stricken eyes and unsteady mouth.

Yet he was the one to speak first—to clench his arms to his sides and advance, with a threatening kind of gesture.

"You know I've not come for sympathy, Penrose!"

Both of us were at that moment pretty strung up, though I believe I realized it the most; I told him with something of an effort:

"You can take what you please from me: you know that well enough."

Then I turned from him sharply and went back into the kitchen to wrestle with the fire. When I returned the break had come; he had flung himself into a chair, and was sprawled half across the table, his head buried down in his arms, in so careless an attitude I had often seen him sleeping after his work. Sleeping! How the word mocked him! There was no rest in that boyish position, no quiet; but through his body there swept tremendous shudderings rather like the swell of an



otherwise silent sea, violent tremblings that shook him from head to foot and made the very table quiver as they caught him beneath their tremors. The pain had Andrew now tighter, I fancy, than during his wanderings that night; it was screwing him down, pitching into his strength like a live thing, shaking him like a man with an ague. . . .

I would have left him and tiptoed away; but I fancy he must have heard my movement, for he was suddenly on his feet shouting aloud with panic:

"Penrose! I say, Penrose, you must n't go; you've got to stay here and help me; do you understand, help me? I'm tricked, I'm cornered; you'll stay, won't you? Something—something's got to be done!"

He was more than ever flushed now, with the crimson standing out here and there in uneven blotches, breathing hard and digging furiously with furious fingers into his palms.

I said bluntly, "The first thing to be done is for you to drink up some coffee."

But he positively snarled back: "Coffee! Great God, man, is that all you can offer?"

I retorted sharply, "It's more than you deserve if you take it in that light."

And he collapsed into the chair again, lolling forward, swaying the slightest. "You don't understand! You simply can't!"

I had thought he was going to break down again, but he sat silent enough, rather stiff in the back and tight in the jaw; neither did he look at me again until



I was actually standing over him with a cup.

"I want you to swallow this down," I told him firmly; "it'll put some punch into you. We'll talk then. . . ."

He glowered up at me, but I did not move; he started to speak, but I pushed it at him steadily, so that he could hardly do anything but clutch it, and his mumblings were lost in its depths.

He drank in great gulps, and something like a sigh went up from him when he had drained it: then, as I proceeded to take it empty from his hands, he caught me by the wrists, his face upturned: "You must help me, Penrose," he burst out. "Because, before God, I can't help myself!"

I could feel my arm and fingers growing numb beneath those iron grasps; all the blood seemed driven out—I might say burnt out, for his own flesh was as hot as fire and seemed to burn deep down into mine.

I answered him as I might have a small child: "Steady, old man, steady! Both of us—we'll see things through!"

He dropped my hands with a groan. "Oh, talk, talk! The thing's too deep; even you can't see how deep."

I said, sharply, "Look here, Andrew, you must pull yourself together, you must face this thing out——"

And he broke in on me to cry violently:

"Face it out? What do you think I've been doing out there all this night? What do you imagine? Walking? Laughing? Idling? I tell you I've been

through hell, and lower—lower than that if possible! Trying to get a thing and watching it avoid me; seeking for an answer—a way out of all this confusion, and staring all the time into utter darkness! Such a blackness that it frightens me, puts panic into my very soul! You can sit there and tell me to ‘face the thing’! Pretty talk—damnable chatter! The thing’s too big—too big, I say—I’m fighting with my heart, my love, my whole being—existence! And you tell me to face it out. . . . God in heaven, if I could, I’d turn my back and run screaming away! Now, *now*—tell me to face it out in that calm methodical manner you fancy!”

It cost me a great deal to answer as I did then; nevertheless I managed it. I replied with as much coolness as I could summon, “Yes, that is just what I do tell you to do!”

I thought he was going to strike me, for his arm crooked up savagely but never reached its mark, for he dropped it wretchedly to his side.

“I suppose you think I’m a cowardly skunk?”

I shook my head. “No. For I judge you by your honor, not by your moods!”

He said bitterly, “Oh, that, that!”

“Just that,” I told him; “and whatever you say or think, it is men of your kind who can’t live without it.”

He said furiously, “Honorable with Ayerst; is that it?”

I groped for my pipe in a cupboard before I an-

swered. "Ayerst is of no account," I replied. . . .  
"It is yourself I am thinking of. Your honor."

## 4

He was silent for a very long time before he spoke again. He sat staring through the open door into the garden, more himself again by now; tighter about the mouth, steadier in his eyes.

You must know I never thought of him as anything approaching the heroic. To begin with, I look upon the word with some indifference; we make heroes of men for littler things than big deeds, endurance or the like: the word has become commonplace enough, the old swagger has died, the old meaning is passed. . . . Man carves his own destiny, makes his own way; you may name him what you will, it does not matter; sufficient he is of the right stuff, it will place him on a footing with the gods. . . .

Andrew, then, had just that dogged determination that adventurers have; he was hot enough to continue his path wherever it might lead him. At one time that might have been part of the excitement; now it had become a certain wistful pride which urged him to track the thing to its very end, no matter the cost.

Nothing of the hero, you see! Yet there may have been a few who would have dubbed him idealist. . . .

He began to speak very low in the voice, very hurried.

"It's my fault, you know, Penrose; my fault all the way through. I was a fool, and I played a fool's game; I bottled myself up with all manner and kind

of thoughts; thoughts that in my crass stupidity I considered so right and proper! Thoughts that have beggared me—lost me everything, lost. . . . O my God! those very thoughts have even made a sacrifice of my beloved! I had no pluck, Penrose, no courage! That man, that sailor at the inn—why, I had to go to him to be taught the real meaning of love. He did n't hesitate; he did n't hang about mouthing this idea and that! He knew his worth; he knew hers! And such as it was, he fought, he murdered for the thing: I tell you he was worth a thousand of me with all my ponderings!"

He was shaking all over again—a big man, yet appearing suddenly pinched and shriveled. He went on:

"I knew I was too late when I went to her that night; something kept on telling me that, making me run, run—keep on running, chased over the Wold by that new terror. I had already lost. . . . She told you more, I imagine, than I can. It does n't matter now; it's over, done with—finished!"

He laughed wildly: "And the joke is Miss Swinsco! She fancies she's pitchforked me out of some thousand acres or so, and she thinks I'm ready and gasping to snatch on to them! What do you think it matters to me how much more, or how much less, is mine? What do you suppose I care? Not a damn! Not one solitary damn!"

I suppose I did then the cruelest thing that it was possible to do to any man in such a state as Andrew at that moment. You had only to look at him and see

the desperate look of appeal in his eyes, the pinched and tragic look about his mouth—and know in some frantic way he was trying to bluff himself into this reckless attitude; to laugh at the thing as a joke, put it aside as a sheer impossibility, pass it over with all the ease in the world. . . . To say nothing, and let Andrew go off about his work while at some still moment that crackling bit of paper in my pocket would make capital firing for my hearth! It was so easy, so pitifully easy. . . . Yet with Andrew—the Andrew I knew and honored—so hideously impossible! With an effort that cost me much I caught hold of the hateful thing and fairly clapped it on the table with the remark:

“You may not, but Cathy—what of Cathy?”

## 5

All the excitement died out of his face, leaving it mask-like and vacant: he pressed with the back of his hand against his forehead as if the lines there pained him and he would ease them away. He said very wearily:

“I know, I know; I had n’t forgotten.” And then asked violently, “Why did you bring it? Why, why, why?”

I told him: “You know well enough; one day you might be forced to regret your—carelessness. . . .”

He stared at me blankly. “What day?”

“The day your child is born, the very hour you first see your son. . . .”



He whispered brokenly, "O my God, my God!"

Because I could n't look at him then, I turned and stared away through the open door, and I know it struck me there was something horribly ironic, to turn from him to the calm of that morning, to know that men, women, and even beasts were now setting about their business regardless, heedless, unknowing—and if knowing not caring—while within some few feet of me there sat Andrew caught up in the most dreadful torment! . . . Of course it was none of these things. The world will not stop spinning because one man is in agony against its pricks. Yet I was convulsed with sudden savageness against an unfortunate drove of cows that went by at that moment. I know I got up and slammed the door hard.

I heard Andrew saying very loudly:

"One thing, Penrose—and you may damn me forever; I'll not hurt Tarnia over this. You can talk of laws, morals, and the like; I tell you they may go hang. . . . There are some things a man can't do, and this is one of them."

There was something tremendously grim about that rigid jaw, a relentless gleam in those steady blue eyes; no touch of the dreamer here, no thought of a careless mind—all the toughness of his heart and brain held on high for all the world to see. Mind you, I knew then, so far as Andrew was concerned, the matter was finished; I defy any moralist to work through that great chunk of stolid determination once it was uppermost: but it did n't prevent me from say-



ing—testing him in fact: “I am not so old I do not know that; or for that matter, so dull. Yet life had a plain enough way to it, and if you want to alter it you’ve got to think it out pretty squarely first. . . . Conviction—God! They’ve to be answered, you know.”

He retorted: “As to that, I’ll take my chance with God, as it would seem He has staked it with me! Conviction——In my muscle and health, in my endurance and the hands that are mine to aid me endure! For I tell you this, I can heap up a better offering—yes, and a finer one—to my child through this body of mine than all the splendor of Coltons with its ill-gotten gain and damnable memories!”

I said slowly, “Still, there is Cathy——”

He jerked out, “And you judge me because of her?” He went on vehemently: “You do, you do! That you can’t deny, and I’m not saying you should. But things have happened—vile things, hideous things! They’ve twisted my world into an impossible shape; they’ve marked it down with the most terrifying shadows! Shadows, Penrose, that will track me to my grave. . . .” He spread his hands very wide on the table and looked at me, his mouth twitching. He said abruptly, “Did you ever love, Penrose?” He went on dreamily, “It’s too much for me, that’s the truth: too big a thing to pitch up against: it is immense, immense!” He paused; then continued: “You can’t say, ‘Do this—do that; this is right, that is wrong!’ Up in those heights such words don’t

seem to reach you! How can they?" He stared at me fiercely, bewildered a little. "How can they? Impossible, impossible! Cathy——It was different. She seems happy—I think, I hope; for my part I marvel at her patience, for I am very far from the husband she wanted. A dull brute, really, you know, with dull ways: she—her very prettiness needs brighter things than this farm existence. Still, she knew that well enough; she knew how much and how little I could give. Yet I have wondered at many things. Most of all, I think, at the very thing in her that appealed to me so. Her loneliness. You may smile, but before we married that is how she appeared to me, dejected, friendless even; somehow it touched me, and it was my own desolation that answered. There is comfort from woman, Penrose, there is supreme comfort in two solitary souls, brought together. I owe her much for that: soon, I may owe her more."

I stared at him incredulously. "Cathy! Lonely? Is n't it rather odd?"

He nodded. "I suppose so. Moods are queer things; that was hers then. . . ." He fumbled for his old brier-wood and commenced to clean it, stabbing at the bowl, with random jerks, then settling down to scrape it with methodical fingers.

He said suddenly: "You made me read the Bible, Penrose; you swore to me it would make me sleep. I'm thinking you were wrong, for I tell you the mystery in it is too great a thing to close your eyes on! Even those prophets—coated in wisdom—they

could but stumble in the darkness of their own wondering! Wisdom!" . . . He laughed savagely: "Not for lovers! They were too old, those prophets; love is too strange; even the serpent won over God!" He shut the knife with a snap and leaned toward me, breathing quickly, his dark brows bunched together.

"See here, Penrose, was it not Solomon who wrote the Proverbs? Solomon who cried out for wisdom, whom men called magnified? Yet even that great Solomon sitting at his tablets could only write: 'Three things be too wonderful for me, yea four which I know not! . . . The way of a man with a maid!'"

The knife slid into his pocket, and his fingers knotted into one tremendous fist: "You see, you see! And I am not Solomon; I have not been blessed by heaven! Who am I, then, to do marvelous things, great things, proper things?"

He thrust his hands out toward me—strong brown hands, hard and thin, with wrists of steel, and veins that showed like narrow blue cord.

"These hands," he said, and I observed there crept into his voice a note of great humility: "These hands. Look at them, man. Let them be my judge, my pride. For me, for my wife, for my child; they shall work; plow and dig and bruise and fight; but never, never, never turn against that first love of mine, that one woman, and see her outcast from her own house! Hiding her face—her dear face—because of this wrong Ayerst has done, because of that lie he has told to her—to me."

I said violently: "Are you sure of this? Are you certain?"

"Utterly, utterly!" He paused a moment, then went on: "All night, all those hours I have been up against the thing. I have been fighting—my God, how I have fought—to see light, to do the right thing." He looked at me earnestly: "I knew in this I could not even turn to you or any man! How was it possible? The answer lay in me, I had to probe it out! The iron burnt in my soul; I had to find water to quench it! Cut off from the world—and yet, O marvelous jest—I had to answer the world! Well, here's my reply. Tame enough, weak enough, worthless, too; this I know: if the day should happen I will be ready enough to answer my son."

He had filled his pipe and paused for a while as he used the match. "You, now," he demanded. "You, what have you to say?"

"Not much," I told him. "Not so very much. Keep at peace with yourself: that is the whole wisdom of man."

He retorted a trifle bitterly: "Brave words, brave philosophy! Peace? Not here, not here. . . . And even afterward who knows that my poor ghost will not tramp these Fens?"

I asked bluntly, "And the will itself, what of that?"

He stared at it gloomily. "Oh, I would see it dust! Better you had let Miss Swinsco hug it in her coffin!"

I shook my head grimly. "Wrong, wrong—utterly wrong! Look here, Andrew, I see, I understand

—many things. Possibly I believe: I do not know! But one thing I am certain of—that paper!” And I flicked it with my pipe-stem. “That paper, you can’t let hold of it! Ah, don’t interrupt, I know how well you hate that thought, yet acknowledge it you must. Put out your whole strength and grasp it; it’s absolutely vital—vital to your name, to your peace of mind. For see here: life does n’t stand still, though a good many of us are apt to think so—it moves apace; we step away, not back, remember that. What may not signify *now* may be of most violent consequence in the future! To-day, to-morrow; the months and years to come, are your business; you sit in charge for your own existence, more especially for your wife and your child; let that be: I, who know you well, know how brave an answer you yet may stand and give them. But there are others yet to follow down after you—others who will look to you for what you have left—bless you for it, hate you for it, know you only as some distant figure belonging to a dim past, yet tied to you—don’t forget that; tied to you and therefore laying some claim. Time and events move and change quickly—terrifically! What you may not want, these followers at your heels may cry out for; well, you must be ready. You can’t destroy that secret; it’s not your to destroy, only to hold on to in trust. . . .”

He looked at me stormily, and then down to where it lay.

“Sometimes I hate you and your philosophies!”



"Better that than yourself," I told him.

He only heaved his shoulders in contempt, and stretched an unwilling hand to the paper.

"What 's to do with it, eh?"

I said, "There 's my desk: it 's tough enough both of lock and wood."

He shook his head doubtfully. "No good. I must be keeper!"

I said amazed: "You? That 's a frightful risk."

He went on doggedly: "It had better be mine than yours, a most heavy one—and you know it. I 'm of poor enough stuff, but at least not so poor I can't shoulder my own responsibility."

I made foolish efforts to argue with him, but he was stolid on the point.

"Too unfair, too rotten a position, to put you in; if you lost it, if it in some way got known—why, good Lord! No! No! I 'll take the chances!"

"You 've no hiding-holes in your place," I reminded him irritably. "You 've got to show some discretion, you know!"

He relapsed into a fit of musing and then came out of it with an exclamation: "I have it, my coat!" And began to slip it off.

I said blankly, "Your coat——?"

He replied: "Oh, it 's useful, more than you imagine." And spread it out on the table. "You watch, this sort of fashion . . ."

He had the pocket-knife open, and with a curious deftness slit the lining just beneath the armpit. I



noticed then there was yet another of a soft leather and a kind of thin oilskin beneath that.

He continued: "You see. Just in here, between these two linings, and if you get me a needle and thread, I 'll give it a stitch to keep it in place."

I found both for him, and he settled to it in a most decided way, folding and patting the paper into place, catching it there with remarkable cuteness and stitching the seam again with a perfectness that was skilful from so big a man.

"You see," he told me, "needlecraft is a good bit part of my life: in fact, I rather think it's hatched out of loneliness, and I know nothing so useful." He help up the coat and stared at his workmanship with approving eyes. "A good coat this," he remarked. "I had it made, and with the old dog it's proved companionable enough. Now, it's even more a part of me, now: we hold a link between us, this old jacket and I! . . . Funny, funny world, eh, Penrose? Hands that wove this stuff together, little did they know to what strange purpose it would lend itself. . . . Now, when I carry it on my back, I carry also something more than wool and leather——" He broke off and stared away with unseeing eyes as if he caught a glimpse of some forbidden vision.

"Memory!" he said suddenly. "Just that—memory."

## CHAPTER VI

### I

**I**T was at the end of October his child was born, and I have even now a very distinct memory of the night it happened. A very clear remembrance of stones rattling against my window and Andrew staring up as I leaned out, his voice echoing through the still air.

"It's a son, Penrose! Is n't it wonderful? A boy of my own, my very own!"

Very clear. . . . Of the snow lying thick and white over the Fens, with here and there a skeleton tree showing dismal and bleak against the whiteness of a moon that shone out in lonely splendor rather like a gleaming mirror, immobile and steadfast in all that boundless space; of sleepy murmurings from the sea drifting inward on a sluggish breeze; all these things, they stand out crystal-clear in my visionings! And most of all, that young, impatient voice: "I have a son, Penrose—is n't it wonderful, a son. . . . ?"

I went down to speak to him, and he came in for a moment or so: cold and fresh and almost spellbound at this marvelous thing! talking in excited, hurried

sentences, stopping every minute to cock his head anxiously to one side as if for all the world a-listening that even at that distance some sound or other might fall upon his ear to recall him. He couldn't sit; it seemed impossible he could smoke even: he simply walked up and down the room full of restless and impatient planning—even at that early hour—so much that was wonderful for that little life.

He went on impulsively: "They let me see him, Penrose—let me hold him for a second. Such a tiny thing you'd never believe, such a scrap that became almost lost in my great hands!" He laughed delightedly at the recollection. "How strange, how strange that so small a thing grows into—so much! What traffic there is in life, eh, Penrose? What traffic! Such goings and comings, such adventurings and voyages!" He whispered below his breath: "Wonderful, wonderful." And remained silent awhile. He swung round suddenly to cry out.

"Oh, one thing, one mighty important thing—his name; I had an idea, and Cathy—why, Cathy quite liked it too. We—we're going to call him 'John'; good name that, eh? Ah, but listen; you'll see what I mean. Last Sunday there came that bit from the New Testament for the Gospel: you know when Gabriel visits that old fellow—what's his name? Zacharias! that's it—Zacharias, and speaks of his coming son. It's the way he trumpets it out that takes me so; the terrific swagger with which he blazons his announcement! . . .

“‘And thou shalt call him John. . . . For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. . . .’”

He was staring down at me with most passionate intensity: “There’s a fine swing about that—a wonderful touch of courage! ‘Great in the sight of the Lord!’ Not as me! God forbid he should ever take me for an example, but as that John; a man of tougher substance than I; a man of purer heart than I could ever have!” He laughed suddenly and I could trace therein a note of bitterness. He said violently: “Oh, I dream, I dream! Poor, soft fool that I am, how I dream!”

I replied roughly, “I’m inclined to think the time is ripe for you to count your blessings!”

He stared at me wistfully. “I wonder. Sometimes I am afraid.”

I asked quickly, “What of?”

“Am I wronging him? Am I? Cheating him out of his birthright, even as I was cheated?”

I shook my head severely. “Wrong thought that! Get it out of your head, man; drive it out from your brain! You’ve enough to give him now; I see you giving him more by the time he’s ready for schooling. This son——He’s fixed pleasantly enough. How goes it with Cathy?”

He said slowly, “Why, I think she’s pleased!” He flung a hasty glance to me, then fell to rearranging his muffler with hurried fingers.

“It’s hard on women—that sort of thing. Easy for us to talk, easy to rejoice; it costs them more than

it ever does us. I only saw her an instant; she seemed——”

He paused, stumbling for the word, then shot it out: “Relieved. Well, so am I for her. All these past weeks, they’ve dragged on her, I’m afraid; I used to think it was wrong—wrong this should have happened. After all, what are my desires to her pain? When she first told me I was the gladdest thing alive until I noticed her face, and then I reproached my eagerness. . . .”

I asked curiously: “What do you mean ‘reproached’?”

He looked uneasy. “Why, she’s a little thing, you know, Penrose—young: and full of young ways: somehow I thought then it seemed hard. I said so: I told her that—that she should be so distressed—it seemed unkind, unfair. I think then she thought I was mad.” He colored up as he spoke. “For she stared very wide-eyed and laughed. I could hardly expect otherwise; it must have been sheer absurdity to her.” He smiled somewhat ruefully.

I questioned, “And now?”

“As I tell you, relieved. They assure me it was all pretty easy, but doctors and nurses they all talk.”

## 2

So John came, you see; heralded by snow and christened while it still lay thick on the ground. They made me a godfather, and I saw to it there was no hitch about the young man’s name, but for that mat-

ter it was never really used in all its full splendor: somehow or other it twisted into all sorts and kinds of derivations. . . . Johnnie, of course; then suddenly Jock, and even more suddenly Jockey: and that finally stuck to him. He grew and he thrived with due nicety; there was nothing about him that pointed to a likeness of Andrew, or for that matter of Cathy, though he was every bit as fair as she, if not more so, and I know her father persisted he had her eyes. I never noticed that: Cathy's were uncommonly bright and of a much lighter blue than Andrew's, turquoise I believe is the right word, and very pretty at that: but the boy's showed even fainter in tint, and showed also just a streak of solemnity which marked him with a gentler air than she. He was thin and small, with hair the shade of corn, and a straight mild little mouth with a sudden upward tilt when he laughed which for one instant seemed to transfigure him into happiness itself.

It goes without saying he was the glory of Andrew. He was such a big fellow—Andrew; Jockey such a bit of humanity, taken it seemed from the very edge of life: and yet between these two, as between himself and Gulliver, there existed an undying love, a wonderful understanding. As with the dog, he would talk to the child in that grave grown-up fashion he used to all animals and children. I have seen Andrew when the boy was still crawling lying full length on the rug by the fire, the child encircled by his arms and whispering to him by the hour his day's work.



Such conversations! Such distorted fragments! Broken only by the thudding of the dog's tail as he caught his master's eye. . . . You would hear Andrew say:

"Good luck to-day, little chap, mighty good! Fancy this now. . . ."

And then I would lose a bit, either because his voice would sink away into a kind of drone, or because I had become so fascinated in watching the two of them, I lost all sense of hearing. Then, above the ticking of the clock once again further waves of sound would reach me. . . .

"Splendid, was n't it? Thirty acres at such a silly price, ready drained and all, you know, young man; ask Gulliver, he'll tell you! Drained and cleaned and ready for sowing! I tell you we'll have you bobbing on the plow before your strong young toes know how to move over the ground. . . ."

And the thin face of the boy would break up suddenly on its chirrup of laughter and he would dab out at that intensely thick head of hair so tantalizingly close, and then relapse into his old gravity waiting for more wonder words to come from this wonder father.

Romance! Ah, forever romance! From the day he had bawled out his lungs in passionate appeal to mankind when the sea would have none of him and he was flung head first ashore to see what the earth might do—from the night when he and Tarnia held each other close on the Wold and all the stars crowned

them in their worldly, wise, loving fashion. . . . So now, this same romance tilted the bowl in her old alluring way and bade him drink—drink and dream again with this beloved joy clasped tightly in his arms.

## 3

I know it was that very talk with the child which seemed to annoy Cathy so one night. I suppose she must have overheard some of it when she came to fetch him for the bath; later, when she came down again just before supper, she questioned Andrew.

"What's this about another heap of land you're buying?"

He looked surprised. "Why, I told you at dinner-time."

"It was as much as I could do to listen then," she retorted. "There's enough to do with the seeing to of the men's meal. I can't settle to think!"

He asked mildly, "Why don't you leave that for the girl?"

"Because I can't," she said sharply, "She'd give them the larder full, and you know it!"

Andrew looked uncomfortable. "Oh, well," he muttered. "This land though. It's crown property just up for sale, and I was infernally lucky to get it at so low a price. It's likely to be good business for us!"

I saw Cathy's brows shoot up nearly to her hair; she exclaimed somewhat shrilly:

"You don't mean to say you've wasted your

money on those mud-flats? Why they're right up against the sea-wall."

"It's better conditioned land than some nearer in," Andrew told her. "Those surveyor chaps have made a remarkably good job of it. I tell you they're uncommon proud and they've a right to be!"

Cathy, stitching at some frock, bit the cotton with a decided snap of her teeth. "You're always won over by any sort of talk! That's so like you, Andrew; it makes me tired. Better ground going all around you and you pick on the worse! Silly, I call it; just as well toss your coin into the sea!"

Andrew flushed very red. "Oh, come now, Cathy, give me credit for some intelligence. I do know something about land, you know. Besides, you've got to remember I'm not in so rich a state as to be able to pick on any field I may want."

She screwed her eyes very small indeed, to see better the needle head she was about to thread; then speared the cotton into shape and jabbed it through with lightning speed.

"That's rubbish," she said crossly. "Some acres were Ayerst Swinsco's, you could have got them had you pushed a bit; proper land they were, ready sown and all. For that matter," she fixed him inquisitively. "For that matter, I can't think why you don't try for the whole farm. Now old Miss Swinsco's dead and they've got that great place at Colt-Harrow, he'd have been only too glad to sell, and probably will; and

even then I suppose you 'll be all stand-offish and not make a single offer."

Andrew said quietly, "I 'm afraid so, Cathy; there can be no buying or selling between Ayerst and me."

She said very crossly: "I always did say you were as silly as they make them to quarrel with him. And whatever it was about I can't think; after all he was the heir: 't was n't as if you 'd any cause——"

Andrew muttered, "No, I suppose not. . . ." And kicked at the fire with his boot.

That seemed to vex her even more. "Then you're a simpleton," she cried. "Ayerst as your friend, and you might be living in something better than a bit of a cottage."

Beneath his breath I heard Andrew whisper, "Always Ayerst, always Ayerst——"

I don't think she heard him; she was jamming her things into a box preparatory to laying the table. She went on irritably:

"You could have had it for the trying; you don't suppose she with all her grand ways will want to live there? It'll remain shut up and empty, and you'd have done better as his bailiff than spending good money on rubbishy government waste. . . ." And she had whisked through the door rather like a pretty but decidedly mettlesome kitten.

## 4

That you see was the way with Cathy; and I have picked on this particular incident as a fair example of

her attitude to Andrew and the farm. Be it understood, I am not blaming her; somehow I do not think it possible ever to do so! And when I think of her now “stamping” through life, a perfect whirlwind of petticoats and impetuosity, I cannot for the life of me mark her down as blameworthy; only infinitely sad, painfully tragic. I suppose you would call her wilful; I suppose when you saw her bright—so very bright yet highly inquisitive—eyes, you could but sigh because of the very waywardness that showed there. Moods, whims, fancies—I tell you she was chock-full with them! Such a bubbling peevish little person; magnificently aware of her own importance, her own ideas, her own intelligence. Forever showing, on the slightest provocation, a kind of offended bitterness as if somehow or other all her genteel tastes and notions had been unpleasantly jarred by the rude enthusiasm, the rough venturings, of the man she married. And it used to make me think devilish hard how great a distaster might be brought about by any showing of that vagrant bit of paper. . . .

Those years I think the gods bent kindly toward Andrew; those years he went forward apace, pressing out his path with giant strides. Always—I believe—the earth had delighted in him, marking him down not as a mere tiller of the soil, but rather as some husbandman watching and nursing its mysteries. Now in its quiet way it opened up to him, stirred beneath his strong hands, his indomitable patience, and gave him back, bit by bit, inch by inch, most gracious an-



swering to his ceaseless labor. . . . Those fields, those dreary mud-beds, they spread their ways serene in the beauty of their greenery, tranquil with pride before those gleaming yellow spears of corn, glorying not a little in the wonder and magic of the seed that would go out in great sacks to feed the cities. . . .

Pushing forward! By the time the child was two, he had built on another room to the cottage, roofed and painted the old barn, and turned it into a capable cow-shed, and added a spick-and-span neat-looking dairy. This last was the result of very shrewd foresight on his side, and the installing of three placid cows! That there was even the shade of a risk to this scheme I very much doubt; the village had milk from Mellow Farm, and a few kept goats; lately there were numerous instructions by Ayerst that that side of the farm was to be given up. Andrew then came as an answer to their puzzlements: apart from that he was conveniently near. From the very first the scheme went forward; yet I remember it annoyed Cathy exceedingly: in fact, she very nearly spoiled it. Andrew, you see, had the happy and entirely wrong idea this at least would have been of interest; to that end he looked to her to take charge of all the butter-creamery business. Truth be told, it only caused her high indignation. I suppose it struck her as being unreasonable, with the boy to look after and the one little maid to drive helter-skelter, here and there: it also seemed highly unpleasant to all her dainty ideas. She perplexed Andrew by this attitude: he never seemed quite



to understand her objections: but I know he looked remarkably uncomfortable and even distressed; I think he imagined he had committed some thoughtless blunder, and settled the matter by hiring a girl from the village to take over the job, and incidentally did without a cow-man.

By the time Jockey was four, then, he could look to a prosperous enough father and a jolly big place for his small legs to waddle about in. I know even old Yardley admitted this; I caught him one day lugubriously watching the efforts of Andrew and a boy pursuing half a dozen pigs about the yard in the vain attempt to get them penned and ready for market the next day. When I had said all the necessary polite things, I remarked cheerfully:

"Getting on, eh? Something to be proud of now, this place!"

He nodded moodily, "Doubtless, doubtless, but I think one should not be overconfident."

I said, exasperated, "Well, he can't go back, that's obvious; and you must agree there's no reason on earth he should n't go forward!"

He pressed in his loose puffing lips with one large forefinger as if all the weight of the world lay on his shoulders.

"I suppose not," he murmured doubtfully. "Nevertheless, enthusiasm——" He released the lips and puffed them out more than ever: "Enthusiasm can at times be overreached."

Here a pig butted against the paling, pressing there

with tremendous passion, to be followed by a shout from Andrew: "Catch him, Penrose—get hold of him sir"—this obviously to the stately Yardley. "Lay on to him, can't you?"

When with a squeal and a scuttle it scooted away in the opposite direction before the astonished Yardley had even become aware of it and I was releasing my legs from the hot, tight fingers of Jockey, who had apparently sprung out of nowhere and was bent on embracing them, I heard the wrathful bawl from Andrew: "Butter-fingers, butter-fingers!" And the indignant protest from Yardley: "Amazing, amazing!"

Jockey and I had one famous quality in common—a sense of humor; so far as that I remember we had our own private laugh, a thing of immense secret between us: at that particular moment the stunned expression on Yardley's face did, I regret to say, bring it most excitedly into force! He took refuge in clearing his throat with tremendous solemnity:

"When I was our age," he muffled out, "I was in bed each evening at six."

He thrust with his waistcoat at the earnest little face peering up at him. "Six," he repeated heavily. "And it is now six forty-five!" He produced an enormous clock (I suppose it was a watch) from his pocket, and breathed again. "Six forty-five!"

The culprit and I stared at each other, and I know I felt as if in some manner I was also to blame for this frightful hour, only at that moment Andrew came panting up, "What about six forty-five, eh?" And

put out his arms to the boy. "Hullo, monkey, learning the time? My! What brains!"

And once again I could discern that curious light which seemed to transfigure that thin little face, as if somewhere behind it a candle had been lit: as he dug with his tiny fingers into his father's shirt and snuggled his head sure of his security beneath that strong throat. Andrew began to murmur. . . . "Now if you know, if you were a proper son, you'd have flown around and have caught those pigs! But of course you're not a proper son, are you? Quite impossible with those bits of feet. . . ." (Here they were thrust out for inspection.) "They're not much good, are they? Seem to have a trick of sliding away and letting you drop; jolly unkind of 'em, really, when you come to think of it; what about seeing if we can't buy another lot, eh?" . . . And the small head was suddenly flung back on a burst of gleeful chuckling, rising again with dancing eyes and the bit of a mouth pressed upward to meet the very brown face bending so happily down. . . .

Then with a rush and a flounce Cathy appeared, rather flushed and sparkling: "Oh, there you are!" she cried crossly. "*There* you are and your bath getting cold! Goodness gracious me, how you do dawdle with the child, Andrew; you know it's his bedtime and all."

"Exactly what I was saying," came the ponderous whisper from Yardley: "I—was in bed at six o'clock!" And he seemed to swell in the most righteous fashion.

Cathy tossed her head and collected Jockey from his father.

"Oh, I'm sure we all know about that, and more!" she retorted irritably. "Anyway you kept me up to it, well enough!"

Andrew said amusedly: "Seems to me I'm at the bottom of this! Young man, what sort of truant are you to keep that poor mother of yours waiting about, eh?"

Cathy started to turn up the path. "Oh, I sent him out to say good-night," she remarked pettishly, "but not to stay and hear all your nonsense; I suppose I shall have to put a kettle on again."

She went in through the door, her voice rising from the inner room on the shrill cry of "Katie! Katie! another kettle sharp as anything. . . ."

I supposed she was fond of the child: I do believe in her own way she felt a certain amount of irritable, impatient affection. Whether anything of a finer, deeper kind ever stirred behind it all I could never say. There was nothing very extraordinary about Jockey; on the other hand you could not help observing the gentle dreamy little spirit tucked away in a delicate, sensitive little body, but just how much that queer small nature appealed to her is difficult to say. I don't think she ever quite pretended to understand, yet there have been moments when she smiled; there was something uncommon pretty about her when you caught that smile. . . . On the other hand, her shrewd brain did mark him down as decidedly different from

the village children, and particularly from the lanky vicar's equally lanky dissatisfied twins: it caused her intense satisfaction if not pride, and she set about to make her small position a very certain one in Ditchling. Thus it was on certain occasions she would become regardless of the wants of the household and Jockey himself, solely to put all her unwilling energy into putting frills into some summer jacket for him and tucks to a print frock of her own: and however cross and painful its doing made her (for she abominated sewing above all things) it would be well worth while when she could step stiffly up the aisle the next Sunday with Jockey in tow, blissfully aware of the completeness of a decidedly dainty picture!

But love? Cathy complicated your wonderings from the first; the more you thought it out the more unsatisfactory the answer. There was something akin to the swallow in her, that darting, heedless flight to this thing and that, for that whim and this fancy; I do not think she could ever make up her mind to any feeling that demanded so much, be it mother-love, or the very height of some great passion: she was too unsettled, too uncertain; and if it were possible for such a thing to be, I think it would but pass as suddenly as it came—worn away by the very excitement itself, leaving her fretted and bored, looking about for something else, different, fresh.

## 5

It was at the end of that year Tarnia and Ayerst



came back to Colt-Harrow. Just in time for a great Christmas display, and just after Jockey had celebrated his fourth birthday.

Something of a difference, this home-coming, to when she had returned many, many years back to the weeds and cobwebs of her father's welcome. Had he lamented then at the bitter turn fate had given his plans and hopes, the tremendous doings now on hand must have made up for it. Or was he too blind, too deaf, to hear or see? Too deadened in spirit and flesh to understand? The place could only flaunt him for what he was now, a crazy and broken old man; flaunt him in all its newly found splendor; that very splendor he had so madly tried to win, that very splendor he had bought at so frightful a price! Somehow I do not think he noticed such things, I do not believe he realized with what speed these home matters went spinning about him; rather I think he sat mooning and nodding over the fire in that dim odd way old people have, while his groping brain felt and peered into those dead and distant years he had at one time nearly forgotten. Forgotten. . . . Was it possible? Little things, rare, distorted glimpses of old—so old—memories and things! The first uniform and with it the first marvelous breathless feeling as he put it on; his first ship—he could not remember her name, but he would remember as if it were yesterday the whiteness of her decks and the gleam of her sails; navy oaths and navy ways, sudden fights and sudden calm; that great crowd of canvas whiter than the clouds in the



heaven; that vivid blue sea and the silently moving line of ship as his own followed Codrington at Navarino. . . . How could he forget? Blurred and maybe even unsatisfactory to his groping mind, but part of him, part of his wild romantic heart. . . . Smell of orange-trees and hot, hot sun; scent of burning sea and murmur of strange tongues; somewhere near to him a glimmer of a white dress, somewhere so very near the gentle beauty of one face . . . always that one. So as he dreamt I can picture him whimpering in childish dismay to see that face then clearer, whimpering in bitter anguish because the waking must come, and it would have gone. . . .

Trumpets and bonfires! What in God's name did they matter? The old swagger had passed long ago; it only remained for Time to sweep away the crumbling body. . . .

For my part neither did I see that home-coming: except the glare in the sky from the conflagration and the solitary swoop of a rocket above the distant hills. I watched these vague flares with Jockey wrapped round in a blanket perched on my shoulder; they fascinated him, and I believe in some unaccountable way they fascinated me. For I know I went on staring from my window long after they had ceased, and there was no other light to be seen but a few odd stars. Staring,—with endless thought and speculation, one side of me up in arms against the contriving of destiny; the other uneasy, unsatisfied,—seeing more shadows like great live things stalking in endless procession over

the Wold from Coltons to Andrew's bedside. . . .

But I went to see Tarnia. Not in the eager fashion you might expect, but hesitating, reluctant—undecided. It goes without saying that from the moment I knew she had returned I wanted quite desperately to see her, but you must remember there was Ayerst to be reckoned with as well; somehow my palate sickened at the thought of that meeting. . . . A new Ayerst this; a new and frightful Ayerst with new and frightful markings about him. I think I would have touched a leper rather than those coward hands which had searched the bed and body of a dead man to turn thief for his own ends, and live on those thievings! And he was Tarnia's husband. . . .

Of course he was there the day I went over; and of course he clung like a limpet to the room as if there was some cunning scheme in the back of his mind; I should not be alone with Tarnia at that first meeting, anyway. The same Ayerst—you may be sure of that! Resplendent in velveteens and colored waistcoat, glossier than ever of hair, smoother about the face; with just the usual stealthy way of placing his feet, and the old unsteadiness on those crooked lips. He seemed to arrange his back against the mantelshelf, and once there was at his usual balancing tricks with his toes, pricking this way and that with his gleaming head, buffoonery forever marking the corners of his twisted mouth. You couldn't talk with him there! I knew that; so did Tarnia: no one for that matter knew it better than Ayerst himself.

Heaven knows what we talked about at first; we threw about words oblivious as to their meaning, at least I did, trying in a stupid way to learn something from Tarnia and learning nothing; aware all the time how apparent this knowledge was to Ayerst, mesmerized after a fashion by the mocking lights that flickered and dodged within those intensely pale eyes.

In the end I fell into a kind of dogged silence, wondering all the time why on earth I didn't go, yet clinging on as a drowning man with a straw to the vain belief that possibly in some roundabout way fate would be kind and let me hear one secret word from Tarnia. Ayerst took up the threads then; in his old apologetic manner he started all kinds of vague questionings, murmured all sorts of deprecating remarks.

"Poor Aunt Swinsco," he said mournfully. "Poor Aunt Swinsco, a great loss that, you know; so many years of constant help to my dead father—I had hoped, when we returned——" He lowered himself sadly to his heels level with the floor again, and murmured on: "Sad, so sad and sudden."

I suddenly found he was surveying me through the very slightest slit in his pale eyes; then catching my own staring intently up, he closed them wearily, as if such an effort caused perpetual distress—and questioned softly, "But you would hardly have seen her."

I thought, "I'll surprise you now, Master Ayerst," and snapped up at him delightfully. "Once!" and a spurt of grim enjoyment shot through me, as I marked the slightest twitch to that uneven mouth; but he

might have been a mere dressed-up image had I looked for any further sign of agitation—which by the way I had n't! I knew my Ayerst. Curiously it was from Tarnia herself a more direct question came, the very one I am prepared to swear Ayerst longed to ask, and shied at it: she said quietly, "I thought the two of you did nothing but quarrel? Had you made it up, or did you have one final dispute?"

I could not see her face, only the smooth shape of her head as she bent over some embroidery: I know she had on a dress of some black stuff and about her lap were numerous skeins of silks, a rainbow of colors heaped carelessly there. I wondered then was it some strange fluke that made her ask this very question, or some still stranger force that prompted her to speak suddenly on the one thing that concerned her—did she but know it!—sitting there; unassuming, patient; the shadow of some olden-time woman, nursing her desire until the gods should beckon her forward. Somehow the proud bent to that head hurt me most terribly; I believe at that moment I was capable of shouting away every vow I had ever made Andrew: then she suddenly looked up at me for one instant with one of her old rare strange smiles: "Well?" she asked: "well?"

I pushed back my chair, and I know it scraped most hideously on the flagged floor—we were in the big hall—and I gulped back all my big words so that they burnt my throat: I grunted at random, "Religion. . . ." And glowered up at the silent Ayerst. It

seemed to satisfy him, and he drawled lazily, "Ah, yes, my dear aunt; so reverent a life, so faithful."

I saw something like a shiver pass through Tarnia, and for my own part I had a vision of that vindictive swollen creature clinging to her crucifix, contorted with passion against this soft-footed, smooth-tongued jackal; carried at last to her grave by chanting priests content she had opened wide a most certain pit for him to be sent crashing into: content, too, that she had left poison enough to snare him in his own game; content her plottings marked out a clear way for her soaring soul. . . .

I suddenly became aware Ayerst was regarding me with head cocked to one side, and twinkling and twitching eyes: he said with gentle humor, "So our friend Andrew is married?"

I said stubbornly, hating the man then as I have never hated him before, "Yes, yes; what of it?"

He crooked his head to the other side, so that the pale eyes darted to Tarnia and rested there flickering. "Why, what indeed?" He murmured on, "Cathy, eh? Little Cathy Yardley." He shot himself upright on his toes and twinkled round in my direction again, "Cathy Yardley. . . ."

I suddenly began wondering what man or woman could have borne such a son: had another Ayerst betrayed his mother, or some female of his kind trapped the father, or both? Somewhere there must have been the poison. Did he take it when he suckled or heard it oathed hideously upon him? That hardly mattered:



it bubbled easily and well through his veins, it helped most admirably to oil his subtle tongue. . . . I said doggedly: "You've got the name with perfect correctness—a friend of yours, I believe, at one time?"

He lowered himself with gentle grace to the floor again, and let out what might have been an apologetic sigh. "In the same village, you know." He repeated with gentle resignation, "The same village. But Andrew—old Andrew. . . ." He shook his head reproachfully. "Such an odd fellow, old Andrew."

I flashed back at him: "What of your father, eh? 'Odd' do you call him? He left a brave enough mark behind for all that oddness!"

That only tickled Ayerst, and somewhere behind the smooth, sympathetic mask I knew he was chirruping gleefully to himself. He said soothingly:

"Oh, yes, that is so, that is indeed so! A splendid fellow, dear old Andrew—quick possibly like my poor father, but a good fellow, a dear good fellow."

He paused, snapping down his pale lids with such unusual swiftness that I almost expected to hear a sharp click as if somewhere within some mechanical wire worked. He continued faintly to murmur: ". . . A dear good fellow," over and over again rather like a sleepy parrot. Then he suddenly opened his eyes very wide and twinkling the question politely, "Surely, there is a child?"

I retorted gruffly, "A boy."

"In-deed." He wagged his head as if in deep surprise. "*In-deed*: the old rascal! A boy, well, well:



dear old Andrew; how very splendid!" He went on wagglng that glossy edifice now at Tarnia, his sleek voice droning through the gaunt hall: "You hear that, my dear? Dear old Andrew with a boy. That should please you, it should indeed." He turned apologetically to me. "Tarnia just loves little children. Just loves them."

## 6

Marvelous joke that to him; splendid touch of humor there! If you could have seen the gentle merriment twisting that long mouth, if you could have counted those scoffing, flickering lights—tokens of this jolly fun—frisking away within those colorless eyes! I had had enough, and bent to grope for my hat; I had heard enough—seen enough; I only wanted to clear out, and clear out quick. I got to my feet looking at my watch. . . . It was at that moment some polite individual—man-servant, valet or something of that species—appeared from the shadows and muttered some few subdued sentences to Ayerst, who thereupon assumed an air of weary importance and with many murmurings slithered away through the door. It was pretty evident he had no objection to my being alone now with Tarnia: in so subtle a manner had he paved out the first part of my visit, he had no fears for the tail-end.

There he was right: I could only stare at her dejected and spiritless: there was no heart left in me to say the many things I had so eagerly hoped to. Had I

expected anything from her—which by this time I did not think possible—I was disappointed: she caught me by the arm and whispered under her breath, “It was good of you to come: for me—you can’t think how good! But not again: believe me that is best; in the end it can only make the hurt worse.”

I did n’t question her: what was there left to question? I only mumbled, “All right, all right,” and pressed her hand as it lay on my arm. She came to the great door and stood silent as I opened it, and then stood, still motionless, at the top of the steps beside me. It was when I turned to say “Good-by,” she suddenly asked in curiously level tones:

“Does she make him happy?”

I had a sudden fleeting vision of that Andrew of old—enthusiastic, hot at heart, splendid in laughter, splendid in love: that old impulsive Andrew who surely at some time had lain in the earth and let the sun bake him there! Well, the soil still marked him with her color, but it was the husk of that Andrew who walked the plains, a patient moving body pushed on by some dogged, persistent force: playing so tragic a “make-believe” for the sake of his small son. . . . I could not tell her that; I simply slid away from any direct answer to the question: “Why, there is the child. . . .”

She asked in the same quiet manner, “Are they like each other?”

I mumbled something about a “little lad”; I made vague attempt at description; I wound up with the truthful enough admission I had never been able to

liken him to any one "except himself," which was the most idiotic remark I fancy I have ever made.

I don't think she heard; I hardly believe she listened: beneath her breath I heard her whisper, "That does n't matter: it is his—his very own."

With a sudden quick gesture she put her hands to her face and stared away over the pale bleak garden; she went on in the same quiet way:

"I am not so very old, you know; I could have loved—a child. Sometimes when I think too much it seems hard—O my God, so hard—that other women should have what I have never known! And yet, do you know, I am glad, glad—for that child's sake, do you understand? Can you realize how great my fear was in case——? Do you think it wrong of me to say such things?"

There was something profoundly touching about that pitiful question—about the manner in which she asked it; but she continued before I could speak:

"Not you, I am sure not you! Like everything else, it is a joke to Ayerst; sometimes he twits me with it; there is so much which appeals to his comic side—that is one of them." She looked at me with the faintest vestige of a smile on her lips. "You see," she murmured. "We have our amusement—he and I; he thinks I want so much; and all the time I hug my dream to my heart, and in my way, laugh my own laugh."

With a sudden quick movement she came a little closer, bending her head, breathing her words:

"That child——" she began, and then paused, but kept her eyes full on my face—those strange, unfathomable eyes, with mysterious strange lights. She repeated again softly, "That child—when you are next there be sure to give my love—my dear love!"

Lest you should think I had any scruple about that message, let me assure you I had none. It stood out fresh and clear in my mind and would stay there until my chance came to deliver it. And a gleam from Andrew's window as I passed bade me try my luck then and there, that very evening. It so happened Jockey greeted me, a warm chuckling, talkative young Jockey, full of immense excitement concerning the sundry doings—marvelous ones seemingly—that "farver" had been up to. He kept me alive with them until Andrew himself appeared, rather like a tumbled-looking school-boy, with an enormous jug in his hand and terrifically bare arms.

He shouted out: "Hulloa, old Penrose! You've come in time for a most astounding event; I'm bathman and nurse all in one to-night; Cathy's with her father; come along and witness the amazing thing!"

There came further hoarse chucklings from Jockey, who proceeded to double himself inside my thick coat and nest there; letting out at intervals stupendous wriggles. Andrew went on: "Look at young Columbus! Did you ever see such a toad-in-the-hole? That's because he smells soap! To tell you the truth," he went on in a somewhat shamefaced manner, "I can only do the trick by pretending to be a groom and

hissing away until I nearly blow my teeth out. He knows that, the young villain: that's why we behave like a regular circus."

He was pouring water from a gigantic kettle into the can, peering at me through the heat and steam, clattering with the numerous pots and pans, shouting out stray remarks at stray intervals: "Glad you came in; where have you been all this time? You'll stay on to supper?"

He seemed suddenly to have completely disappeared behind the clouds of vapor that flooded around him and even his voice seemed muffled up in it. I took my courage in my hands and said very slowly:

"I was up at Coltons this afternoon."

The water stopped pouring, and there came a sudden silence broken only by the hissing of a kettle. The steam seemed to clear a little and I saw Andrew standing very straight, staring directly at me, his arms tight at his sides, his fists knotted—very white and sharp about the knuckles; a great tightness about his jaw so that the bone seemed to cut out of the brown flesh like steel. He said grimly:

"You were up at Coltons?"

I nodded. "Yes . . . you'd better know it; also that I saw Ayerst."

The color seemed to shoot up in his face like a great flame and to kindle in his eyes with that swift-ness I know a torch will give light to a beacon. He stammered back furiously:

"Good for him it was you, not me. I sometimes



think my fingers will burst their flesh to get out at him. I would like to see each one of them mark him—mark him for the bloody dog he is!"

I said gently, glancing down at Jockey, still burrowing in my waistcoat, "Steady, steady on, old fellow."

He shouted out, "Ah, you would stand up for him."

I knew his mood and I answered to it, "Well, you can put it how you like."

His voice seemed to twist suddenly, to break up and end in a kind of desperate struggle. He tried an attempt to laugh, but it was something nearer a sob that broke from his quivering lips. He spluttered out: "Sorry, sorry; I did n't mean that; you know me better. . . . I meant, meant——"

The flame had died out of his face; he might have been a boy, tongue-tied, blundering desperately with stumbling words, that could not, and would not, give any clear utterance. I could read his eyes, read the dumb appeal that was set there: in what clumsy fashion I could I gave him answer. Heaving up Jockey so he stood upon my knees and keeping my eyes on his all the time, I just told him.

"Why, she asked after this monkey of a fellow; she sent her love, her dear love."

In the moment's silence that followed I could hear the kettle spitting its wrath very loudly and sharply; I could also feel the steady tattoo of small feet on my thighs; then Andrew suddenly stepped over and caught hold of him and swung him up in his arms.

"There, give me the boy," he said roughly, and swung him out of the room.



## CHAPTER VII

### I

**A**LL this, mark you, before the coming of the New Year; all this atop of Jockey's birthday and just before the tenants' dance held at Coltons on Christmas eve. Very grand that, from all accounts; very much the big affair to liven up the villages and be the one and only topic for days afterward. Cathy went: pomposity Yardley as her escort—not Andrew, you understand. When the invitation came he said nothing either one way or the other to Cathy's going: he only made it very clear that she must do without him, and I know that put her in a high state of indignation. She had a great deal to say about his "nasty stubborn ways," and all those "silly high-flown ideas"; but I know when the evening came around she'd forgotten her vexation in the huge delight of her dress and slippers and all such other dainty things. She went off with her father, pink with excitement, very pretty and very important.

Andrew and I then spent our Christmas eve smoking silent pipes over the fire until much later, when we crept in stockinged feet to the bedroom rather like two conspirators, to hatch many secrets with number-

less stockings which we hung in rows round about the cot where Jockey lay. We stood there awhile after this tremendous thing had been accomplished, staring down at the dreamer who lay there, until Andrew muttered softly: "Funny little beggar, eh, Penrose?"

And as I tiptoed to the door I heard him murmur with infinite compassion: "Little blessing, wonderful little lad. . . ."

Tarnia I never saw again until—well, never mind, let me go directly ahead with the thing. Ayerst did occasionally appear, sometimes perched very high in a glittering dog-cart, sometimes very lanky and grotesque on horseback: always very quizzical and polite, always gently amused at apparently nothing whatsoever. Once or twice I caught him with Cathy, and I know that had angered me intensely; somehow it seemed so blatantly disloyal to Andrew. For however little she knew of the real state of affairs, she did at least know his feelings, and she knew that the village knew them too and approved of them, hearing of Ayerst's brotherliness immediately upon his father's death. Once, too, I had caught him staring little Jockey out of countenance until he fled like a small scared rabbit up the path, and Ayerst, seeing me at the same moment, cocked his head to one side in greeting, and set those pale cold eyes flickering and twitching in their same odd way. . . .

But all this is merely by the way; spring followed, and hot and blazing on her heels a sweltering, baking summer, bent on doing mischief and scorching the life

out of things. Grass that was n't grass, but merely rusty-colored bits of wire jutting up from burnt and splitting earth; green stuffs that simply could n't grow and did n't, but stuck about withered and crackling like so many thorns scorched in their very roots, scorched as soon as they stared out at the red-hot sun. A straw-colored world, it seemed, those days, with sweating, panting men wrestling and struggling on top of it. Of course the usual prayers went up for rain, and though you couldn't talk of a drought it was a pretty near thing, and a regular sigh of thankfulness went out when it did swirl down on that baking earth.

Then of course it went to the opposite extreme, and people began to grumble at this most lengthy flooding of streams and pools, to say nothing of the dikes, which began to fill up and overflow in some parts. The keepers at the big sluice-gates higher up the dike were always poking and watching the smaller one at Tilling Plain, and the farming folk, having shaken their fists at the sun, now shook their heads at this never-ceasing downpour, and gave up the last vestige of hope for a promising harvest. For my part I reveled in it; there was something tremendously exciting in watching that driving rain, to see it batter in upon that dry, crusted earth, to see it spurt and gush like a waterspout out of those great gaunt cracks; to watch a sudden life movement behind it all! I used to sit in the hay-loft with Jockey and see it streaming muddy through the farm-yard; we had one great game

in making absurd and skittish little boats from match-boxes, with one match for a mast, when they would be dropped carefully into one special rivulet and sent whirling away—wrecked or cunningly upright—down to the dike! Great days those. I remember how we used to chuckle wickedly at “farver’s gloomy moanings.” Ah, such jolly, jolly days!

## 2

Gradually it seemed to pass, and we did hope for a somewhat kinder summer, neither so infernally hot, nor so wretchedly wet. One particular day and night brought a shower or so, only to be followed by a morning that was dry enough, but sluggish and threatening! and almighty hot! Thick clouds! great gaunt ink-black things—that pressed dumb and menacing very low down to the swamped, steaming earth. Hothouse heat that day! suffocating, choking heat that seemed to block up each vein, and stifle your nostrils. Andrew and I met at dinner-time, and sat gasping in shirt-sleeves, steadily bent on emptying the cask of cider. It was a pretty silent meal from what I remember; only Jockey, as usual, was beaming away, excitedly eating, excitedly explaining some extraordinary new game he had contrived in the barn. He was the first to leave the table, then Cathy—she went upstairs. Andrew and I, frankly indolent and thirstier than ever, still sat on, and I know I thought yearningly of some cool stack of straw and a very pleasant afternoon’s sleep.

Outside there came the sullen drone of bees and farther away the humming of some reaping-machine, overhead much clattering from Cathy as she moved about the room; and I know I wondered drowsily why on earth she wore such high heels, and then became dreamier than ever over the prospect of that straw. Andrew muttered, "Be damned to it, I believe there's more rain coming."

I made a sleepy attempt to be concerned: "Dash it all, I hope not."

Andrew laughed and stretched his arms very wide: "Yawn a little, it may relieve you!"

I murmured contentedly, "That cider was delicious."

From the barn there came the tiny singing voice of Jockey, sometimes very shrill and high, then dropping away to a sudden and rather breathless end. There was something very pleasant about that little voice, and I know it might have lulled me quite a lot if I had n't become so sensitive to Cathy and all her "taperings" above. In the end they positively fascinated me in that absurdly irritated way one can suddenly become over-attentive to a matter of no account whatsoever. And I simply sat there like a stuck pig, listening all the while with the utmost solemnity to those aggravating feet going tap-tap, tap-tap, tap-tap, until I wondered if Cathy ever intended to sit down. I know when a sudden silence did at last come, I heaved a sigh of relief, only to hear it broken again by further and even more excitable heel-tappings which

took on a sharper, angrier note, and at last came flying down-stairs with such a tap-a-tap, tap-a-tap, tap-a-tap, that I fairly wrinkled up my forehead in dismay. Then the door shot open and Cathy rushed pell-mell into the room, very flushed, very sparkling, very shrill, to exclaim loudly:

"This, this! what have you to say to *this*? *Now* I've found out, *now* I understand! What can you say; what can you *dare* to say?"

There was no need to question or show bewilderment; the whole think was so tragically simple, there was a coat on her arm, a crumpled paper in her hand: the complete answer. . . .

She went on in her furious, lashing way:

"Cheat you've been to me! Cheated me all along, that's what you've done! Kept me out of my rights, kept me pinching and starving, living on here in this poky bit of a hole, working my fingers to the bone, so you can fling your money away on these wretched old fields! Fine sport of me you've made; fine sort of husband you make!"

I don't think her breath could carry her on any further, for she ended with a kind of hysterical gasp. I had n't the courage to look at Andrew, and I did n't; but I heard him say, and I marveled at the quiet of his voice, "Cathy, let me explain. I beg of you, let me explain."

But she was hard then, hard as two flints and as pitiless. All the pretty pointed look seemed to have died



clean away—seemed to have sharpened her face and put an edge to it, narrowed her mouth exactly to fit the stabs and cuts she shrilled out.

“Explain?” I tell you that tongue had a two-edged cut to it! “Explain? Thank you, thank you very much indeed! but you can keep your explanations to yourself! There’s enough here for me, plenty for any day, I can promise you. You can talk as much as you like, and I dare say you’ve got a pretty lot to say, but you can save yourself the trouble. I can read, and that’s all I care about.”

And Andrew still went on: “Cathy, I don’t think you understand; I don’t want to make excuses, but I want to explain. I want to tell you how—how this thing came about. Let me! please let me!”

I looked up at him sharply, for it seemed incredible that he could ever imagine that Cathy would possibly understand everything—anything that had to do with Tarnia. And yet, was there something else to explain? And how else was it possible to account for that strangely wistful expression: an expression that might even show signs of intense eagerness?

I think his steady persistence maddened her all the more; she took him up sharply and violently; she cried out:

“Then I don’t want to understand; you can’t talk me over, and the sooner you learn that the better! You did the asking; did n’t you? And a precious little you had to offer: why, if it had n’t been for father giving us a roof, wherabouts would you have put

me, I'd like to know? The cunning of you! You with a place as big as a castle at your back! I suppose I was n't good enough for it? That's about all you've got to explain!"

I could n't stick that. She might refuse to listen to Andrew, but I swore I'd make her hear me. I exclaimed passionately:

"Now, that's wrong; that's an infamous wrong! There was never a lie about Andrew. He had what he had, and little as it was he offered it you, and you accepted. *He* was lied over with this, lied and cheated even, right and left, never mind how, but he was; it was only when Miss Swinsco died he knew: she told him; it was her way to spite Ayerst. That's when he knew; that's the explanation."

She gave a sort of laugh, very high and treble in tone.

"So you were in this, were you? I might have known that; you always had something up against me; you'd like to do me out of all you could. That's the truth, is it? Pretty sort of truth, I think. We were married then; I suppose you put him up to these ideas how to treat a wife?"

Then Andrew boomed at my shoulder: "By God, Penrose, will you keep out of this? I'll do the speaking, see? It's my job, not yours!" And he shoved me with a brown naked arm back against the window. He cried out to Cathy: "I say, Cathy, this is terrible, utterly terrible! You must think the most hideous things of me, and you're right enough to

think them! No, I'm not going to defend myself; but I want to tell you—tell you and I hope you may understand, tell you——”

But she was in at him again, crying shrilly: “I tell you I don't care! I don't! I don't! I don't! You had some reason, some mad reason; you're full of them, but it's nothing to me; nothing, do you hear, *nothing!*”

Then quite suddenly her whole face, her whole attitude, seemed to change, to become screwed and pinched with suspicion and passion. She cried out savagely:

“But I know, I do know; you can't fool me! It was *her*, because of her you did it, some plot between the two of you; that's what it was! That's why you would n't go to the dance; that's why you'd never go near the place! I might have known. I *did* know: there was plenty of artfulness behind her quiet ways; she liked you well enough as a lover, but she took good care to have Ayerst and his money-bags to keep house with her!”

Somehow Andrew had got hold of her thin wrists, forcing her up against him. He said thickly: “Cathy, Cathy, you must stop, do you hear? You're not to say those things! They're lies, lies, and not for you to speak. You've got to go easier, think easier; you must, you simply don't realize all you're saying!”

She pulled away from him furiously.

“Realize! that's just what I do, lots of things now, and one of 'em you can't deny; you had a liking for her, that you can't!”

Andrew let her go, turning away to the door; he put his hand up to his forehead and pushed away the hair that had tumbled there.

"That's so," he answered drearily: "That's so. I don't deny it——" He checked himself, then on a sudden impulse said quietly: "And you'd better know I should never want to."

Cathy stood watching him, rubbing her wrists with swift kneading fingers, not speaking for the moment, but so tight about the mouth that you could virtually see her busy little mind sharpening itself to the last degree before breaking out afresh:

"You've a way of saying things, have n't you? Pity I did n't learn it; pity I have n't said a bit more all this time back; might have done you some good; might have put some end to all your high ways. You thought you were clever, keeping your likings from me; tried to hide it up behind Jockey; made out you were a devoted father! You! . . ." She laughed and flung back her head: "Father, you! Why, it makes me laugh—laugh. I'll show you how it makes me laugh."

And she whisked through the door and was calling, "Jockey, Jockey! where are you? Come here now, sharply, can't you?"

And came back dragging the child with her, a rather mystified, panting Jockey, with hay clinging to him and mud on his jersey. Andrew cried out with some show of temper: "Look here, Cathy, I'll not have Jockey brought into this!"

Her eyes mocked him; she said scornfully: "You won't, won't you? You've got to! To look at your son—you poor fool you, your son!"

And she laughed again and twisted the little chap's face up to Andrew, now staring in bewilderment. "Your son, eh?" she went on. "Like you, is n't he? Like as two peas, are n't you? Like me a little, p'raps, but a bigger likeness I'm thinking to some one else: what do you say of Ayerst, fool? What have you got to say to that name? How would you like to hear him called 'father'?"

Andrew muttered: "Ayerst, Ayerst?" and looked blank.

She went on ruthlessly. "Deaf, are you? Ayerst, that's what I said; 'father,' that's what I mean. . . ."

It was trying to rain: heavy fat drops splashing with a sickly lumpishness on the stones in the yard. I began to be stupidly attentive to its sound, wondering whether it would break out again: even counting it in a sort of dogged, determined way.

"One, two, three," I made out, then a pause. "Four," I muttered, "five, six, seven," all rather hurried and breathless, then a dead stop. I strained eagerly, "Eight, nine . . ." "Ten," I whispered gleefully, "ten," and waited with every nerve on the alert in most frantic desire it would start again, and let me be occupied with some other trifle to shut out all sound, all thought. "Ten," I repeated huskily: "Ten. . . ." It had ceased. Instead of anything



so sweet as falling rain I heard Andrew's voice—cracked, stammering:

"You are telling me—telling me. . . ."

Then Cathy, impatient and short: "I've told: you've but to look and use your eyes; it's plain enough!"

And Andrew—his face covered, his body bowed and shaking: "I can't, I can't!"

She was looking at him half scornfully, half boastfully: hands on her hips, with the palms turned outward, pressing up against the table with its soiled crockery. Jockey had slipped into a far corner with Gulliver, raising the flaps of those soft ears to croon into them. There was still the same peaceful, slumberous air about the room as when Andrew and I had lounged over cider only a short time ago. You would have thought nothing had happened, nothing had changed, until you saw that crouching figure up against the wall. . . .

She answered tartly: "Well, if you won't, you won't!" She drew a hair-pin from her head and began to jab at her hair with it. She went on sharply: "You thought you would fool me; well, I fooled you first, and I fancy I fooled her into the bargain!"

She stabbed the pin back into her head and leaned forward on the table, her voice taking on a high triumphant note.

"Right under your nose! I had my chance, I took



it, in London; they were honeymooning, I was there with cousins. She can be as proud as she likes and as fine: too fine for Ayerst, that was it; too much of a good thing for him. He and I—we got on together; that 's how it was." She stopped: for an instant she was more the petulant, irritated Cathy of old, cross as two sticks because there was a hitch over something, but mighty set on getting it her own way somehow. She said viciously: "Need n't think I 'm ashamed; I 'm not; you 'd better know that. Why should I be? He took me out; where 's the reason that I should n't go? I drove with him; dined with him, too: why should n't I? I like a bit of fun: who would n't? He was dull: I made up to him—that 's all! Afterward—well, the rest was easy, easier than I thought. You were so serious—so serious and so blind! I knew what you wanted, more than you thought I knew; well, I gave you it, did n't I? Properly, too, as it turns out; you poor loon of a man!"

The sting in her voice would have made the least sensitive of men flinch—my God, it was frightful! It must have cut Andrew: bitten into him like a salted lash, for I never saw a man's face so knotted and drawn, so twisted and seamed with unbearable suffering. He had spun round on her, shrieking out: "Stop! stop! stop! stop, I say! My God, my God, will you not have done?" He stood staring at her like a man transfixed by some terrible spectacle, his fingers knotted, and bunched up against his mouth, his eyes straining out from their sockets as if he could see her clear

enough. He said slowly, speaking with caution, as if contemplating each word as it left his lips:

"You're lying, you must be; how could it be otherwise? Lying—and you're going to confess that lie before you leave this room. A bit of bravado, perhaps!—some joke—some foolish, boastful joke. Well, I don't understand your sort of fun: something about me can't seem to see it. But I'll laugh with you, Cathy! That's what I want to do—laugh the roof off! But be sure first—be sure of you, of myself—of Jockey. Be certain of this—fun."

He stopped suddenly. His face alive with fear, panic, the veins standing out on his neck like corded purple streaks. In a sort of flash he had hold of her shoulders, pressing them hard and shouting:

"You can't speak, can you? There's no answer to to give, is that it? No joke left between us because you've had it, no laugh to be laughed because you've had that also with Ayerst—with Ayerst; the two of you!"

She was struggling and fighting in a vain endeavor to free herself.

"Let me go, take your hands away; you beast, beast, you're hurting, hurting!"

He let her go; he said very quietly: "I see. It's written in your face, in your eyes. I understand; I was a fool to have believed—thought as I did—your eyes, they can't lie, can't lie."

Cathy was still exclaiming, whimpering and furious. "Beast, beast, beast!"

He looked at her strangely. "Things seem to come in—come in. . . . Is this the end? It must be, must be! I have waited long enough. Endured. . . ." He checked himself, turned on his heel and out of the door; I could hear his feet clattering on the stones, then growing to a softer thudding as he reached the farther yard.

## 3

I must have stood for a long time stupefied and dazed, staring out of the window: at least it seemed ages to me, though I imagine only a matter of a few minutes. I wanted, you see, to go after Andrew: I had a sort of vague idea I ought to keep him in sight,—it was n't good for him to be alone,—and yet I seemed to be fixed and stuck where I was, revolving innumerable thoughts and questions—unable even to understand them, much less find any answer. Then I heard Cathy speaking, rather defiant and bitter:

"S'pose you think I've acted badly? Ill treated him or something! I've paid him back in his own coin, that's all; he did a rotten thing on me. I'm no worse."

I said, "No worse?" And stared at her dumbly. "No worse?"

She looked very sullen. "Of course you take his side."

"It's pretty different, is n't it? He's not wronged you so deeply as that: he would n't ask you to forgive him, you know. You've said hard things. I suppose

you thought them right ones. You've smashed him down—down, deeper than you or I can ever imagine. Well, I suppose you know best. If it was revenge you were after, you've won all through."

She answered in the same sulky way: "Why should I be done out of my due? Why should I do without because of her? He put her before me. . . . I'm in for my own now!"

I said doubtfully: "You've never wanted, Cathy; you've not been grudged anything. You may have started here in a small way, but it's grown to a big enough one: he worked for you, give him that credit; he never idled a single day, so as to make the next a better one!"

She retorted snappishly: "Do you think I wanted a working-man for a husband all my life? Ayerst is a gentleman up there; she's a rare lady! Andrew may own the whole land round here, for all I care; there's a difference right enough. Why should I do without it? That's what I want to know."

I said heavily, "Well, I suppose you've got it right enough."

She nodded triumphantly. "I'm going to make sure of it!" She caught hold of Jockey, making an attempt to slide past her. "No, you don't; you're coming with me upstairs first, though: I want you cleaner than that. Sharp's the word for you."

I stammered out, "Cathy, Cathy, what are you going to do?"

She was pushing the reluctant Jockey out of the

room; she paused as she followed to cry over her shoulder:

"What do you think? Do you think I'm going to let things hang on until Andrew thinks proper? Not I! Up to Coltons I'm going, to have a word with her, and one or two with Ayerst for that matter. I'm not for leaving any stone unturned."

She had slammed the door in my face, and I heard her scolding Jockey up the stairs. She was going on with the business, then; going on. . . .

I went after Andrew; I could n't find him. I found, instead, some hot and sweating farm laborer drinking cold tea from a can, who gave me his whereabouts. Down to the blacksmith to get the horse which had been left there; he'd wheeled the gig along with him, striding along at no end of a pace, going on somewhere, that was certain. . . . I might catch up with him before he started if I'd race for it. I did—literally my feet bounded over the road. I cursed myself for uselessly staying with Cathy. I ought to have been with Andrew; it was there I was wanted: at his side—not hers. I caught him driving at a furious rate up the village street: I knew that sort of driving. I planted myself full in front of the racing horse and trap: he pulled to one side, shouting furiously:

"Damn you, Penrose, keep out of my way."

I caught at the side and shouted back, "A word with you first, Andrew."

He laughed in my face. "Not one, before God, not one!" And pulled at the horse so that the brute



swung up with its head and plunged to the middle of the road again, dragging me with it, jolting up against the side of the cart. He cried furiously: "Get away, you fool! Keep your hands off!"

I persisted breathlessly: "You're going to see Ayerst?"

"What if I am; what if I am?"

I answered him; "Then I'll come with you; I swear I will!"

He went very white, and then very red. "I'll swear you don't! I have a word with Ayerst, and I'll say it alone! I've something to give Ayerst; I'll do it by myself, with my own hands; there's no need for the two of us."

I cried passionately, "Think, man, think."

"I've finished with that! I'm *doing* now—*doing*, do you hear? I've done with thoughts!"

I put my foot upon the wheel's axle. "I'm with you, Andrew!"

"You're not, you're not! Get your foot off that wheel."

I cried out at him, "I'll not let you go alone!"

"I'll ride you down first!"

"I tell you I'm coming up!"

He flamed down at me, "Out of my way, out of it, I say."

I made another attempt: "You're forgetting."

But he pulled at the reins. "No one, no one! Not even Ayerst!" And let the horse out with a lash of the whip. The violence of that plunge sent me flying



on the grassy bank, but I was too tough to notice the stumble, and on my feet again staring up the road after the racing cart. Even then he had turned and yelled something back: in that rattle of wheels and choking dust I just heard it.

“Look after Jockey; he ’ll need you.”

## 4

I know I observed with some surprise at the end of the lane he branched off to the left, away from Colt-Harrow, not toward it. Then I remembered it was market day at Spilsbury, and a particular holiday affair with Ayerst, when he would arrive at the George in time for an ample dinner, and remain in the town until well after supper, leaving at a pretty late hour. He always treated this jaunt with a kind of flourish, rattling by on the high dog-cart, with a gentle look of inquiry in the direction of the cottage, returning with a glimmer of lamps in the darkness and an extra crack of the whip as a kind of salute.

I remember also how with a kind of patient doggedness Andrew had labored through those days with making schemes to avoid him: getting away early in the morning, cutting back by some rough bridle-path, keeping his head away in the market-place. Once when I had been with him he explained this with the apologetic remark, “I can’t trust myself if I come to close quarters; it’s best to keep a good space between us, for the boy’s sake, anyway.”

And the irony of fate had it that it should be on

account of that child he was out now deliberately to make that meeting! I began to wonder where he would find Ayerst: in the market-place itself, in the streets, in the George, on the road back? I could see them both; Ayerst with the queer twist to his crooked mouth, and the odd flicker of amused inquiry beneath his pale lids. Andrew . . . I shut my eyes hard and tight as if the picture was too real, too terrible. I could only see those great strong brown hands, burnt by the sun, hard by the earth, compassionate with all the compassion of a woman, but frightful, horrible to behold, when raised to punish!

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. . . ." How many years back had that been carved on tablets of stone? Not so very long, surely; it was too fresh, too ready to leap into its own! So many times and the thing had been flaunted before my eyes; so many times . . . Once, anyway, that night at the Smuggler's Arms; twice—the thing was positive, with Andrew racing down the road, seeing it marked blood-red before his eyes as he drove. . . .

It was the carrier's cart that aroused me, ambling up the lane from Ditchling "Old." This lumbering thing did business between Colt-Harrow and Boston, calling at most of the villages on its way; just in time for me, I thought. I wanted to get to Coltons; in my poor way I might be some good there: here I could do nothing but wait, scan the road, and count the minutes, watching and waiting, not daring hardly to think what it was that I actually waited for.

The jolting of the cart sent my thoughts whirling round again, this time with Cathy. I supposed she was with Tarnia; she might even have left. That did not matter: Tarnia knew—knew.

Frightful, frightful knowledge. I thought of Cathy telling; I thought of that violent grain of commonness that had so suddenly made itself clear in each word she had spoken that very afternoon. It was astonishing how it had leaked out, in every sentence, in every word; and I could hear it again between the creaking of the wheels slamming out in its boastful vulgar way as she told this hideous truth to Tarnia. And yet between these two women so oddly matched there was something in common: for I know it struck me how strange a thing it was that each in her own way grudged the other so much. . . .

You can picture me, then, heavily trudging up the sodden drive to the house, with a leaden heart and every particle of spirit I ever had hopelessly gone from me.

Tarnia herself met me at the door; Tarnia herself led me into some room and to a seat in the window. . . . Led me? Oh, yes, that is right enough! I was suddenly completely dependent on her—not she on me! I was suddenly looking to her for comfort, realizing I was too old, far, far too old a man, aware of thick, painful chokings in my throat and hot burning tears from my eyes. So we sat, the two of us, me with my foolish head buried close in my arms, she with one hand on my shoulder, saying all manner of

gentle things, compassionate things, to me—poor helpless old fool that I was—to me! who had gone to her so hoping to offer the one thing she now gave so fully—support, courage! I could hear her whispering over and over again, “O my friend, my good friend—my very good friend! . . .”

And then after a little while, “I wish I could cry. Oh, how I wish it!”

Between my fingers I muttered: “O my God, my God! this is frightful, frightful!” With a wild effort I stammered out at her:

“You’ve seen Cathy, seen her?”

She nodded. “She’s just gone.”

I blew my nose with a most terrific blow. “I never saw her on the way.”

“She went through the garden, taking the field path; it’s a rather shorter way back.”

I suddenly was obsessed with a mad desire to laugh. The whole thing seemed ridiculous, utterly comic: hardly a few hours back and this most fearful happening, now Tarnia and I sitting side by side, the one with absurd womanly tears, the other explaining quietly matters of direction and short cuts! It seemed ludicrous, it was ludicrous. I gave a kind of croak that might have been a cry or a laugh. I said very loud, too loud:

“How is it going to end? that’s what I want to know. How can it possibly end?”

She leaned back a little in her chair shading her face with her hand.

"That is why I am glad you came; I want to talk it out with you. There is so much that must be done."

I was amazed at her fortitude, and I could only stare at her blankly. I said desperately: "I would have spared you if I could. I wish to heaven I had been able to see you before Cathy."

She answered quietly: "I think it was better from her. . . ." She said with a sharp intake of breath: "Quicker said, quicker finished. . . ."

I knew that quickness! I exclaimed, "You can trust Cathy for that!"

She said gravely, as if making an effort to excuse that bitter tongue: "She saw Ayerst, you see; I don't think she expected that. It seemed to make her lose all control."

I asked startled: "Ayerst? Was n't he in Spilsbury?"

"Not to-day: there was a horse he wanted to buy; it was brought over for trial, so he stayed away. Why do you ask?"

I muttered, coward-fashion: "Nothing, nothing."

She looked puzzled. She went on, "Ayerst had wronged her all through." She repeated, "Yes, Ayerst." She seemed suddenly to start into most dominant life. "Where is Andrew? You have n't told me. How did you leave him?" She paused, her fingers pleating this way and that the soft stuff of her dress. "Why did you leave him?" She whispered furiously: "*Why?*"



There was something startling in this sudden change, something that took me unawares and made me stammer feebly: "Why? Why? . . . He would not have me with him."

She asked again, "Then where has he gone? What is he doing?"

I tried to pull myself out of this most depressing state of lethargy which held on to me so fast. I blurted out: "To Spilsbury; he went to Spilsbury." Then I suppose I must have realized how I had said more than I ever intended to; I cried out in sudden alarm—rather for her sake than Andrew's: "But, if Ayerst is not there, it does n't matter; it's all right—bound to be all right!"

She retorted impatiently: "Is it? Is it? Do you think it matters to Andrew where Ayerst may be? Because he is not at one place, will he stop looking in another?"

I said desperately, "Why, there will be time at least. . . ."

She broke in on me passionately: "Time for what? Too much of it, I tell you! Too much!" She bent nearer to me, crying out, "Ayerst! Where do you think Ayerst is now?"

I only stared at her stupidly and she went on: "Out there, out there somewhere—doing something, planning something: Ayerst once again pitting himself against Andrew! And you let him go out; you let him go alone! O my God, this is too horrible, horrible!"



I cried out, "Ayerst! Why, my dear, what chance do you think Ayerst has against Andrew?"

She beat the palms of her hands on the polished arms of her chair.

"Fool, fool! Have you not learned of him yet? I tell you I know Ayerst, if you have forgotten. What is Andrew, for all his strength, his bigness, if you like—what has he ever been against the cunning of Ayerst? Nothing, I tell you—nothing!"

I know I stared at her literally aghast. Why had I been so wrapped up in Andrew and what he might do to Ayerst, as to forget all that he in turn might do to Andrew? Mad, mad, crazily mad to have forgotten, to have passed over so much that was now so poignantly obvious!

I stammered out, "What makes you think this? Did Ayerst say anything, show any signs?"

She shook her head. "Do you think I don't know?" She went on: "There is something about Ayerst. . . . Had you seen him with Cathy, had you watched his face,—seen it change, and change again,—you would know better what I mean. He was frightened—horribly frightened. . . ."

There was something ghostly in the silence that followed. We both sat staring at each other, and if there was horror in her eyes, I swear she could see it reflected in mine. And all the time between our two faces I seemed to see a vision of that other 'Ayerst—Hangdog Ayerst—slinking and trembling at every

footstep; white-faced and shambling, sweating in every part of his body; seemingly hunted to earth, yet all the time sharpening his cunning—sharpening this way and that, this way and that.

I got to my feet, and I know my hand was shaking as I reached out for my hat. "I had better go," I muttered. . . . "Do something."

I heard Tarnia murmur in most commonplace fashion: "It is raining again; you'll get very wet." And then she changed to sudden furious energy, as she exclaimed:

"Get hold of Andrew; that is what you must do. Find him, stay with him; don't leave him—never leave him; and I swear to you I will do the same with Ayerst!"

I could actually feel my eyebrows tickling my bald head. I gasped back, "With Ayerst? You will do that, knowing his mood?"

She retorted scornfully, "Who else? Who else?" She flung out her arms as if with sudden complete abandon she at that moment flung hope and all its minions from her, to cry desperately: "Oh, this rain! It terrifies, terrifies! . . . I think of those two following each other round in its very midst, blinded by it, drowned by it! Who would have thought there could be so much horror in falling rain? . . ."

I tried to soothe her by inarticulate, meaningless sounds, so empty and crazy you could not take them for words: they simply do not matter; I only know

neither of us spoke again until I stood at the foot of those entrance steps, when she called after me:

“He cringed as he spoke to Cathy—he left here cringing.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### I

**C**RINGING! That was exactly it; that was exactly the frightful word that aroused all too frightful thoughts in my mind—in Tarnia's. Cringing: as he had been when he forged that check and crushed, with one frantic hammer-blow, his father's life; as he had been when he fumbled and sweated in coward-panic with that same father's body not so many years back. Cringing! Horrible, horrible word! . . .

For virtually half the way down the slope, that was the only thought which held my mind. It seemed as if a thousand ghostlike fingers were bent on pressing it and it alone, in and out of my frozen brain. . . . "Ayerst cringing! Do you hear, do you understand? Cringing: and out of that what may happen? Out of that how much may come?"

In a most desperate fashion I tried to shake myself free of this horror, to get away from it and face things with a calmer, steadier spirit; to clear up my mind for a meeting with Andrew, for some plan—some reasonable scheme to keep him with me when I saw him once again. Yet all the time it was Ayerst, Ayerst! Ayerst only I kept on seeing, hearing, watching, dread-

ing! That white twitching face, the pale mockery twinkling out from beneath those paler lids, that odd twisted mouth and the selfsame odd twisted smile. . . . Here, at my side, as I staggered along, keeping step with me in every step I took: Ayerst, Ayerst, forever Ayerst!

I stood still for a moment partly to get back some of my breath,—for this driving rain made walking no easy matter,—partly to see if it was possible to catch sight of Cathy and the boy; for although they had had the start on me, yet I judged myself a sturdier walker even in this infernal deluge than either of them!

There was mighty little I could make out through that curtain of rain; I had to peer and peer again, seeing precious little farther than a yard or so beyond, rain getting behind my glasses and forcing its way into my eyes—shutting them up and making me blink and smart and blinder than ever; rain crawling down my coat tickling my spine and making my shirt cling to my skin in most depressing, clammy patches; rain everywhere, cutting, tearing, stabbing rain. . . .

And it was just as I gave it up as a bad job and prepared to stagger on that something happened,—something entirely terrific happened,—then and there as I stood.

From out of that rain, from the very midst of its immensity, thundered a horse. Huge, blundering beast, with huge tearing hoofs clawing and slithering at the sodden ground, sending stones and mud helter-skelter behind them, water from its mane, water from

its tail; the sweat of its body and the rain that had drenched it, making great ruddles all about its sorrel coat. . . . Quick as it had come, quicker still had it passed! But not before I had recognized one strangely bewildering thing—its fear, its mad, mad terror! In a flash and it had gone, disappearing into the rain with the same speed as it had appeared out of it, yet there had been time enough to mark down the panic of that rush. . . . Great straining eyeballs staring in the most wild and passionate frenzy, lumps and strands of froth over its chest and legs, stained bloody where it clung about that swollen tongue flopping sideways from that gaping mouth: flattened ears—something very frightful in the way those ears were pressed rigid and flat to the top of its head—something very frightful, too, in its way of breathing: not merely that gasping breath of some spent runner, but breath that was literally coughed out in great racking sobs . . . sobs of fear, of horror—that was it—horror, unknown, mysterious horror.

## 2

Let it be said at once I knew the horse, a stallion recently purchased by Andrew, and greatly prized by him; but I rather think that knowledge perplexed me all the more. What in the name of everything was a horse of his doing up here? And why that wild gallop? Why? Why? Why?

And all at once I found myself echoing Tarnia's despair: "I hate this rain, it terrifies, terrifies . . ."



Now—*now* it did terrify. It was too thick, too heavy; it muffled out sound; it cut away sight! Behind it, what was behind . . . ? I started to peer again for Cathy; somehow I felt I must see the two of them, must for the very reason I was so sure they could not yet have reached the cottage. I think then a kind of panic must have seized me. I began to do all manner of foolish things in a completely foolish way: to run a few steps down the lane, and then stop and fumble off my spectacles and wipe them and put them on again and start forward again; and it was then, as I stumbled and stared, I began to hear something, be aware of other sounds over and above the beating rain: different—quite different. . . . I listened again: a kind of dull booming noise, a faint rumble in the far distance. I thought, "Guns," and immediately knew the folly of such an idea. I muttered, "Thunder," and stared upward with most sickly desperation. An immense sky, that was all, stretching far and away on all sides of me: vast, black, enormous—and yet, it was n't thunder, I knew that. I think I was as certain then as I had been . . . from the first. Not thunder . . .

And I was suddenly most painfully aware that I could see, rather well, if not distinctly—for this time the wall of rain seemed to have thinned the vapor that clung to it and to the earth, to have cleared; I was seeing—seeing. . . . No land, but beneath me, as I stood, water, immense plains of rushing water, immense movement of surging water. . . . I think at that instant my heart stood still and I with it! I be-

lieve now the rain was tearing down with even greater violence than before: I did n't notice it; how could I? Right ahead of me it was as if the sea itself had broken up to the foot of the Wold! Rushing, rushing, forever rushing. I could see it now; my God! how clearly I could see! On, on, on! Would it never stop? Now rising up like a mountain, now sweeping forward like some vast plain, leaving behind gigantic bubbles of white froth; shooting out on its front narrow steams, only to be gathered time and again into that advancing sheet of churning water. . . .

It was then I saw a goodish bit below, and, to my right as I stood, Cathy and the boy buffeting along down the hill. Even as I looked she had bent and picked up Jockey, yet only to stagger still on downward—down to the death-giving water. Was she blinder than I had been? Deafer than I? So wrapped in her thoughts she could n't see, would n't listen?

I began to run, run as I have never run before, slipping and stumbling zigzag down the slope, cupping my hands as I raced, to shriek aloud, tearing my coat from me to get along easier. Once I slipped and fell full on my face and was up again and on again and screaming aloud again, and all the time my shouting seemed to be drowned by the shouting of that water . . . *"I come, I come! I am death! I am death! . . ."*

You may think I am mad; possibly then I was mad; but I say, and will say to my dying day, it was as if that enormous flood deliberately pitched its voice

against mine, chanted it on high, I tell you—chantered it out to the world in the madness of its race: "*I come, I come! I am death, I am death, I come, I come! . . .*"

I screamed aloud: "Cathy! Cathy! . . ." But the words only seemed to be hurtled back in my face: "Cathy, Cathy! . . ." I don't know if she heard, but something stopped her and then I believe she realized. It was as she stood that the thing happened, as she turned and I saw the tragic whiteness of her face looking back at me; I suppose she slipped, or Jockey wriggled . . . I shall never know. But in one second she was down on her knees; in one second the boy was out of her arms, and spinning down the slope. In one second she had grasped him, missed—and on that mud and slime went pitching and sliding after him. . . . In one second, and the water had them. Held them on high, and spun them round, flung them apart and sucked them down, down, down. . . . Once I saw them—the green of Cathy's frock flung out wide like a flag on the great face of that water; twice I saw them—one small hand tossed out dumbly protesting against that howling fury; and that was all. All, and there was only left that great waste of sea now supreme in its desolation, supreme in its challenge, its mockery—its laughter: "*Ha! ha! ha! Here I come, here I come! Ha! ha! ha! . . .*"

## 3

I have always imagined that something broke up inside me and gave way absolutely, entirely. I re-

member how that soaked ground seemed to rise up and hit me in the face. I remember how, in a kind of frenzy, I dug my fingers into its slime and clung there choking out all manner and kind of prayers and oaths both to God and the devil. And all the time my heart was crying aloud . . . "Jockey, Jockey! Given into my charge, given into my care—and what have I done? Christ above, what can I say to Andrew . . . ?" Then, in my coward way yearning for that climbing flood to reach out to me, yet realizing I was too high up—too high up and having not a grain of pluck to roll farther down! Despicable, vile! . . . Can you point out a man more vile? And it seemed as if I was strapped to the earth, held there fast, unable to move, unable to stir—kept there in a kind of damnable stupor, sobbing into my mud-stained fingers: "Jockey, Jockey! Into my charge, into my charge! Jockey, Jockey! . . ."

And it was in the midst of this torment I heard Tarnia, felt her fingers pulling at me as I sprawled. She was crying; "Thank God, you're here, thank God!" And as I made no sign to move she went on: "You must n't lie there; you must n't! You're drenched, simply drenched!"

With an effort I rolled over and stared up at her as she knelt at my side. I croaked out: "You must let me be, do you hear? Let me be! I'm waiting, waiting for the water—the water to rise."

Even in my anguish, I knew she was crying then. I knew the water that poured down her face was not

rain, but tears, great heavy tears. And yet her voice was steady, steadier than mine, and rough even. . . . Somehow I appreciated that roughness. "That 's not like you," she was saying. "Not you; you would n't say that: you know too well there 's no good in waiting."

I laughed in her face at that. "Why, that 's bravely said! No good in waiting for water that won't climb; no good in talking when your body won't move, when your spirit funks!"

I saw her wince at that; she cried out imploringly: "No, no, I did n't mean that; you know I did n't! But . . . drowned, what 's the good? You're wanted—even I may be wanted; there 's Andrew; we must n't forget Andrew!"

I whispered, "Of course, Andrew; poor Andrew, poor trusting Andrew!"

She went on, "Let me help you." And then called out, "Come here, one of you, and help me with Mr. Penrose." And I saw there were two or three men with her standing about, staring and pointing and muttering; one of them came over and gave me a hand. I was shaking all over like any fool girl, trembling at the knees, while my whole body was jarred by the persistent rattling of every tooth in my head. I know Tarnia had a great shawl, a kind of plaid, and she swung it round me before I could protest, muffling me hand and foot like a trussed fowl.

If you could have seen that great desert of flooded land as I saw it then! If you could have watched



that frightful, frightful riot of water as I watched it from the Wold! . . . Empty of life, empty!—yet carrying its dead—tearing and hurrying on and on with its dead. . . . Not a roof, not a chimney, not a tree! Only that tremendous space of leaping, mouthing water! Sometimes it was just possible to discern great whirling, plunging masses thundering up against each other, breaking apart and darting away in terrific disorder. Once, I remember, the carcass of a cow, its heavy vacant face, with twisted horns, jammed secure in what was apparently once its shed. Once, I remember, solitary and aloof, a wicker chair, bobbing along as if at peace with all the world, serene even in the midst of this tumult. . . .

I heard Tarnia speaking, her mouth very close up to my ear: "There may have been some chance in Ditchling: they had boats."

What did I care about Ditchling? I could only cry in my despair, "Why not here; why not up here?"

She knew my thoughts, and I felt her press nearer to me, and there was sudden comfort from the warmth of her body. She answered, "I know, I know!" And then beneath her breath I could faintly make out her whisper, "Thank God, Andrew went inland. Thank God, he went to Spilsbury."

She asked suddenly, "How did you think this happened? This awful thing—how do you suppose?"

I said drearily, "All this rain—something gave out, I suppose."

She said cautiously, "Those men." And made a



movement in their direction. "They don't think that; they say they've known worse weather than this; they say . . . things—all manner of things. . . ."

I repeated dully, "What about? What do you mean?"

I could just hear her muffled reply: "I don't know; I dare n't think."

There was something foreign about her voice that made me turn and stare at her sharply: foreign—and I noticed it on her face; some expression that seemed strange, new; and I could not—or would not—understand it. I said savagely: "What does it matter how the thing happened? What do I care? Those two—those two . . . and I faithless to my charge!"

She said with even greater persistence: "There were others; don't forget those others. . . ."

I cried, "What others? What do you mean?"

She said steadily: "These men—relations, friends of theirs—possibly drowned. My gardener, his mother—he keeps on asking what of his mother?"

I muttered, "Well, well?"

"They can't understand why the dike flooded! They won't understand! They seem to have implicit faith in the sluice-gates. . . ."

She came nearer to me; I could feel her lips touching my neck:

"They know of the weather better than you or I: how did this come about, then? That's what they want to know; that's what I want to know! If it was n't rain, what was it? . . . Who was it—*who?*"

She held me dumb with her questions; she held me in most dread apprehension. The roaring of the flood passed into mere nothing. I felt suddenly as if I stood on some immense void, hearing nothing, seeing nothing but one gigantic menacing question . . . Who?

It was an exclamation from one of the men that brought me somewhat to myself again—he was shouting out: “Bloody red; that ’s what it is; look ye.”

The rain had ceased, and with it most of the blackness seemed to have pretty well given over; now, with amazing swiftness, there came the sun, the dying sun. Most terrific ball of fire, with thick crimson streaks streaming away from it on all sides, mingling into that immensity of swarthy sky. . . . And all about that great sheet of water there danced and glimmered and moved its most terrible reflection! Blood-red . . . blood-red water moving over the face of the plain; great crimson patches rising and falling; great ruddy smears, impatient and boisterous, leaping and tumbling over each other. . . . Not from the sun, not from that flaring sky, but from death itself; from Cathy and Jockey . . . Jockey! Ah, most merciful God! from Jockey!

I heard one man cry, “I ’m for getting a raft or the like and getting across. . . . I want to see yonder.” And he rushed by me, the fellow Tarnia had called her gardener.

Not so very far away a flock of sheep, scenting, I suppose, apparent danger to themselves despite the

fact they were safe enough on the hills, were setting up most desolate wailing. It was pretty certain my mind must have been very nearly unhinged and cracked, for I know, in a mad sort of way, those piteous bleatings seemed to me nothing more or less than human—human cries sent on high in desperate appeal for aid and succor. . . . Trapped souls! Trapped and drowned and sucked beneath that raging flood! Was it possible already their tragic ghosts were sobbing out their protest . . . ?

I have often blamed myself for that distorted imagination and wondered if in some surprising way it showed on my face and gave the thought to Tarnia; for suddenly she had rounded on me, her fingers thrust in her ears—a ghost herself, if one may go by color—to cry out wildly: “Those sheep, I can’t bear them! They seem like voices—voices everywhere. . . . And we can do nothing, nothing! Let’s get away from here, for pity’s sake! To listen . . . just to stand about and listen! I can’t, I can’t!”

## 4

When one looks back on all the years of labor and scheming at that great dike—at all the patient draining of those Fens—surely it was the supreme mockery of fate that one man could pit his panic-stricken body—his trembling thought—against that marvelous structure and win—win!

One man. . . . Yes, Ayerst; I doubt very much if any other could have thought out so inglorious a

plan. I have often wondered if it had ever entered his mind before, whether somewhere or other deep down in that black pit I suppose was his soul the thought had lain buried—deep down, very deep—but not too secure to prevent it springing into life, into action, when the time came. Right in front of Andrew's cottage, that big dike, right past his door, right past through his land; and every time Ayerst rode to market he passed that cottage, every time he took the road to Spilsbury he crossed the bridge—probably flicked with his whip the great handles that moved the sluice-gates beneath, possibly at different times watched the man working them; watched . . . and pondered in his comic, quizzical way; thinking out things, humming little tunes as he thought them and seeing all the time the spreading of this hated Andrew's land. Here, very likely, the thought was sown; it only remained for the time: well, that came soon enough, when his coward heart bumped and rocked with fear because of Cathy and Cathy's way, and Cathy's tongue; and how to stop it . . . it, and Andrew's; once and for all; once and for all. . . .

To my mind there can have been nothing so frightful as that white-faced figure lopping its way over the sousing Wold to get that thought out of his mind, to bring it into action! Peering over his shoulder this side and that, peering through the beating rain, ready to dodge Andrew, ready to dodge Cathy, ready to dodge any man or woman, and get that thought over and done with! Judging Andrew in his cottage,

judging him anyway somewhere out on the plain. And Cathy, Cathy even now would be hurrying down hard on his heels—he would see to it she should never go up again.

Hurrying, scrambling, panting Ayerst; pitching on his feet as he stuck in the mud, knocking his knees in his panic—that panic which made him start and stumble and whimper in his running! At that bridge itself he was probably easier, though I can fancy his fingers were clammy and fumbling when he clutched the cold iron handle—bending his gawky body and shoving and sobbing and sweating, stopping to listen for the trickle of running water, for the sloshing as of the violent emptying of a jug—for the rumble and the snarl; bending at the handle—bending it round and round and round—and moving those gates inch by inch, up, up, forever up. . . .

I always imagine he intended to get away himself by the boat (it was Andrew's) that was tethered there. Whether he was reaching out for it and slipped, or whether the water rose with such force it hurled him down the bank, no one will ever know; his, though, was the first body they found when the waters went back, suspended by a hook from the bridge, on which he had evidently fallen, and had been held by it right through the back of his coat while the great tumult of unchained water smashed him full in the face, broke and crushed his body into unrecognizable nothingness. . . .

Two days, I think it was, before any one was able



to get over to those submerged villages. Two days, though I know a few more reckless souls got together some kind of raft and made the attempt. It was in that way three men and a boy from Colt-Harrows met their brave death: with the greatest ease their bit of a craft was smashed like an egg-shell once it whirled out into, and was caught by, that seething flood. They gave it up after that; took on a more sober attitude, and waited and watched for smoother water. The second day, then, we got the first news of Ditchling; there were five souls drowned, not counting Cathy and Jockey, seven in all. One lot of them, a maddened boat-load, bent on getting to safety and the Wold; the others caught like rats in a trap, before they could beat their front door open. Nearly from the top end of the village, where safety lay not in boats,—of which they had not one,—unlike those luckier ones in Ditchling “Old,” to whom it mattered very little if it were dike water or sea water that came their way, they took to the boats with the greatest ease and spent the night out with lanterns, paddling the streets to see what they could find and how they could help.

We were searchers with them—Tarnia and I: we had our share of mourning, our business among them; questioning, peering, full of hopes, full of fears. . . . Cathy, Jockey, Ayerst. . . . And somewhere surely—Andrew, a living Andrew. Of Cathy and Jockey there was no sign; the flood had seen to that. Somewhere I suppose they must have found a final resting-place after many, many miles of travel; taken in at



last by the sea; kept by it, fondled by it; part of its treasure. Ayerst, as I have already said, was the very first found; and the manner of that finding told also the manner of the breaking open of the sluice-gates; only a few hours after and the thing was known throughout the village; only a short time passed before the request was given out and handed on to Tarnia; his burial should be in some other place than the village—neither was he put away in Colt-Harrow, but in a virtually disused churchyard, a derelict tumbling spot tucked away in the wildest part of the Fens; only Tarnia and I were his mourners and one gloomy individual—part fisherman, part grave-digger—stubbornly turning his back on any fee, as did the clergyman. . . .

Of Andrew word eventually did come! bawled out by a passing boatman. He had seen him, oh, yes, there was no mistake. . . . “White-headed. Sure of it; as white as th’ wing of a goose; and crazy-like—crazy it would seem certain an’ dumb wi’ it! I see him—an’ others—you ask? Kneeling on th’ seat of th’ boat pressing so soft wi’ the oar it scarce moved; digging in at th’ reeds, peering in at th’ mud-pools; twisting of his head this side and that, not seeing ahead—not seeing behind; only on th’ water as if his eyes were caught there . . . as if he could n’t see fur enough, deep enough.”

And then, some days afterward, when the land was reduced to merely swamps and pools,—and the water still oozed between the bricks of my floor,—he came

back. Dragging with his naked feet as he walked, blooded about the face and arms, unshaven, with his bones sticking out like the naked ribs of a building ship. When he spoke, there was no feel to his voice; do you know what I mean? No quality, no mood—just a dead sound breaking emptily through the room.

“I ’m hungry,” said the voice. “Hungry; something to eat—to drink.” And pitched into a chair, and I remember how the table shuddered and gasped beneath the weight of his body as he leaned up against it. In a blind way I fetched out meat and drink.

I know all the time I waited for the soup to boil my eyes would turn and turn again in mute inquiry to that motionless figure; I think I was transfixed by that tragic head of whitened hair. I think I was transfixed by the frightful persistency of my own agonized thought: “Is this Andrew? Can it be possible—Andrew?”

When I had set out the meal on the table he seemed to be sleeping; he did n’t notice, did n’t hear: I shook him at first gently, then roughly, when he woke with a start and fell on it with a kind of savage fury. There was something rather terrible in the way he tore and gulped at his meat and drink; more like a wolf—a starving, stricken wolf. . . .

Immediately he finished he dropped back to his former position, sitting there—sitting on through the night until the first glimmer of day, his feet curved round the legs of his chair, his head deep buried down in his arms, hardly breathing, utterly still. Sleeping? Well, I prayed it might be possible, but somehow with

Andrew it seemed so hideously impossible; I believe he just sat there, closing his eyes in a pathetic attempt at a make-believe sleep; while all the time in front of them there passed and shifted clearly and with great steadiness scenes and memories and thoughts—terrible, terrible thoughts; a compact and vast army of shapes and shadows passing and repassing in most perfect order and array. . . . As he had looked those past days, and nights for the bodies of Cathy and Jockey,—silently, tirelessly, without end,—so now in another way, through the darkness, visions from the past climbed up before him, challenged him one by one, passing on to give way to others, treading on their heels. . . . Once I remember in a kind of frenzy I stumbled through the darkness and caught his shoulder, shouting out:

“Andrew! Andrew, for the love of God, can’t you say something. . . . ?” When I felt a sort of shiver run through his body and the faintest sight reached my ears! I slunk back to my seat half ashamed, half relieved, waiting for the light, praying it might be soon.

Possibly I may have dozed. Morning, when it did come, seemed very sudden, though very pale; I stole a glance at Andrew still at the table, and went out into the back kitchen to pump water over my head and start the kettle: I could n’t have been gone for many minutes; when I returned he was gone. I stared wondering at the empty chair and open door, and then, possibly because I was seething with dissatisfaction and all manner and kind of alarms, I went out in hot haste

to bring him back; and, instead of catching up with him, at the top of the lane I came upon Tarnia. . . .

Tarnia, on the great gray horse and that strange old-fashioned riding-dress; Tarnia, looking more the old-time barbarian woman than before: and as I stared up at her I know it struck me in a vague kind of way, as if some change had come upon her face; less of the old mysterious shadowing about her eye, more light from there; more flooding of their depths with unusual radiance: it seemed also there was the faintest smile on her lips; somehow that annoyed me. I could n't see room for smiling just then. She drew up her horse and spoke at once, her voice, very clear (so it seemed to me), almost eager:

"Andrew is back at last?"

I looked at her puzzled; how on earth did she know? "Who told you?"

She dropped the reins on the horse's neck and began gently to pull off her long gauntlets. "No one," she answered. "Somehow, I expected it."

She was looking at me in her old brooding fashion, her brows drawn into a thin dark line beneath her broad-brimmed hat; little lines, too, along her forehead as if she was coming to some tremendous decision, thinking it out with tremendous intentness.

I asked her curiously, "Well. . . . ?" And stood still, expectant for some answer. Rather to my surprise, she got off the horse and stood leaning against its comfortable flanks, regardless of the extreme boggi-

ness of the road, into which her boots sunk well above the heel.

She asked quietly, "Where is Andrew now?"

I told her shortly: "Wandering like a ghost over the flats. Is that to continue all his life? Can nothing be contrived to show him hope—somehow?"

She repeated softly, "Hope. . . ." She was looking, not at me but across the Fen land—over the immense desolation of those fields as they lay naked, stripped of all their loveliness, stripped of all growing things, bearing now upon their barren breasts huge pools of water, torn and derelict trees, despairing heaps of wreckage that might have meant anything, that possibly at one time did mean something. . . . It seemed impossible the yellow garment of the dawn could touch that stricken land with such marvelous tenderness! Glimmer about it and touch it here and there with golden gleaming lights, soften and enfold it with such endearing beauty, weave about it all manner of many-hued lights with as much delicacy as a spider works its webs. . . . Here—where there had been so much drunken riot of water; here, where a mad god of destruction had for some brief time held his furious sway! . . . Here——

Then, suddenly, I was aware that Tarnia had turned to me with her hands on my shoulders, speaking aloud with extraordinary earnestness.

"I have come for Andrew," she said. "Come for him, do you understand? Do you know what I mean? Both of us, you and I—we talk of hope, of light, we



wish for it; long for it—out of this chaos, out of this frightfulness! He and I, together there can be light for us—there is—there must be! All these years—long, long years, not just the time we have known each other, not only that—but before, long before, and sometimes I think before that in dim remote ages, he and I were groping—groping, the one for the other. . . . Now, now—why must we grope any longer? Can you tell me that; can you answer? Not you; least of all you! I have waited. O my God! how I have waited! Surely this is my time; mine and Andrew's, together to search for that light."

Her voice seemed to have changed, even as I think her face had; it seemed to ring out with a trumpet note, which seemed extraordinarily strange and yet extraordinarily familiar. Familiar because in my fancying, roaming mind I could hear in it the echo of all lovers of all the ages; I could vision dimly before me that multitude of women peering for one second from the mysterious past—guardians in their shadowy way of this one loved woman now facing me.

I could not stop that triumphant voice. I did not want to! Somehow at that moment I felt at peace with all the world. I simply wanted to stand and listen.

She continued more softly:

"People can talk—they will, I know that; with them there are such things as conventions—rights and wrongs; with God——" She cried out vehemently: "Somehow I think things are different with God!"



She stopped abruptly, and her face then was very wonderful—as wonderful, I think, as that rising dawn. I heard her whisper very low, “You see I said he would come. . . .”

And, following her gaze, I saw Andrew—his back toward us, his head bowed, standing solitary on the other side of the swollen dike just where his cottage had been.

She did n’t speak again, nor turn the slightest toward me; she simply walked to where he stood. Walked to his side and let her hand move up over his shoulder and rest there. . . . For an instant longer I watched them; watched his face turn to hers, and her hand slip into his; watched them suddenly, of one assent, bend and kneel side by side on the very ground where Jockey had so frequently played . . . those two kneeling there together, palm to palm, cheek against cheek, while the morning stretched wide its arms to salute the glory of the sun. . . .

Then I turned and left them. . . .

















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